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Hawkins et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 8,141,202 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: Mar. 27, 2012**

(54) **VACUUM CLEANER DIRT RECEPTACLE AND EXHAUST FILTER COVER**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 476 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/938,505**

(22) Filed: **Nov. 12, 2007**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A47L 9/04 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **15/352**; 15/357; 15/377; 15/389; 15/50.3; 15/351

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 15/352, 15/357, 377, 389, 50.3, 327.1–327.7, 351, 15/391

See application file for complete search history.

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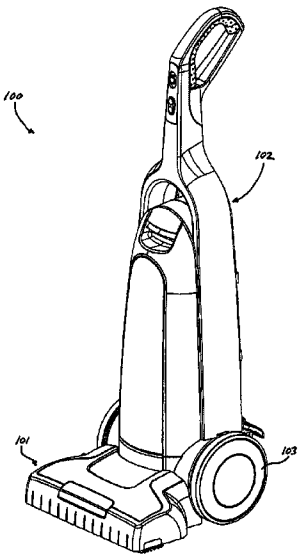
Primary Examiner — Robert Scruggs
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Hunton & Williams

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A vacuum cleaner housing member having a rigid frame, a grate and a flexible cover. The rigid frame has an outer perimeter and an opening therethrough. The grate is mounted in the opening and has an inner surface, an outer surface, one or more air passages extending from the inner surface to the outer surface, and an outer perimeter wall defining the peripheral edge of the grate. The flexible cover extends over at least one of the one or more air passages and is positioned over at least a portion of the outer surface, extends around at least a portion of the outer perimeter wall, and is positioned over at least a portion of the inner surface. A vacuum cleaner including the housing members similar to the foregoing member is also provided.

21 Claims, 20 Drawing Sheets



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Undated—admitted prior art.

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FIG. 1

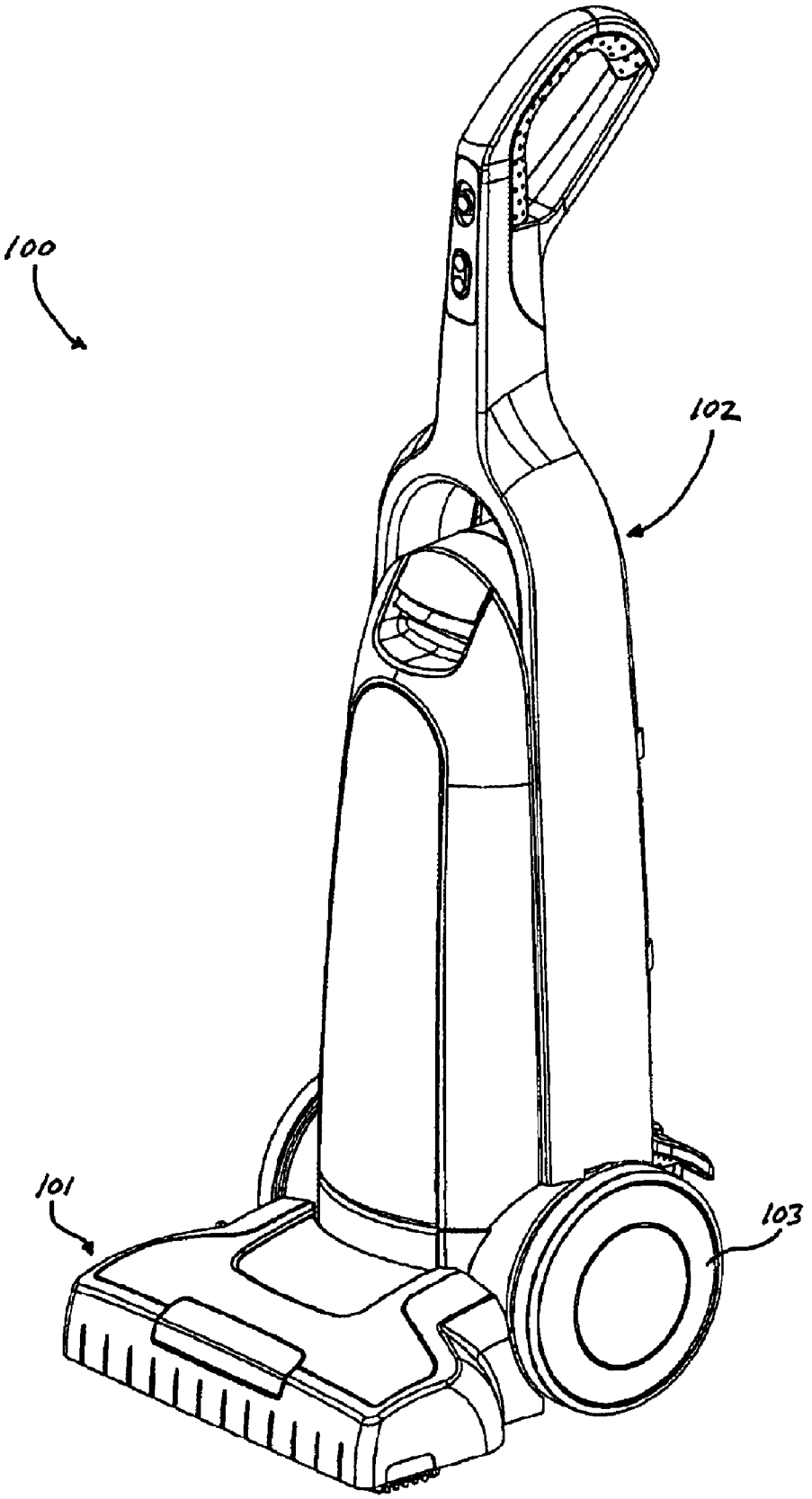


FIG. 2

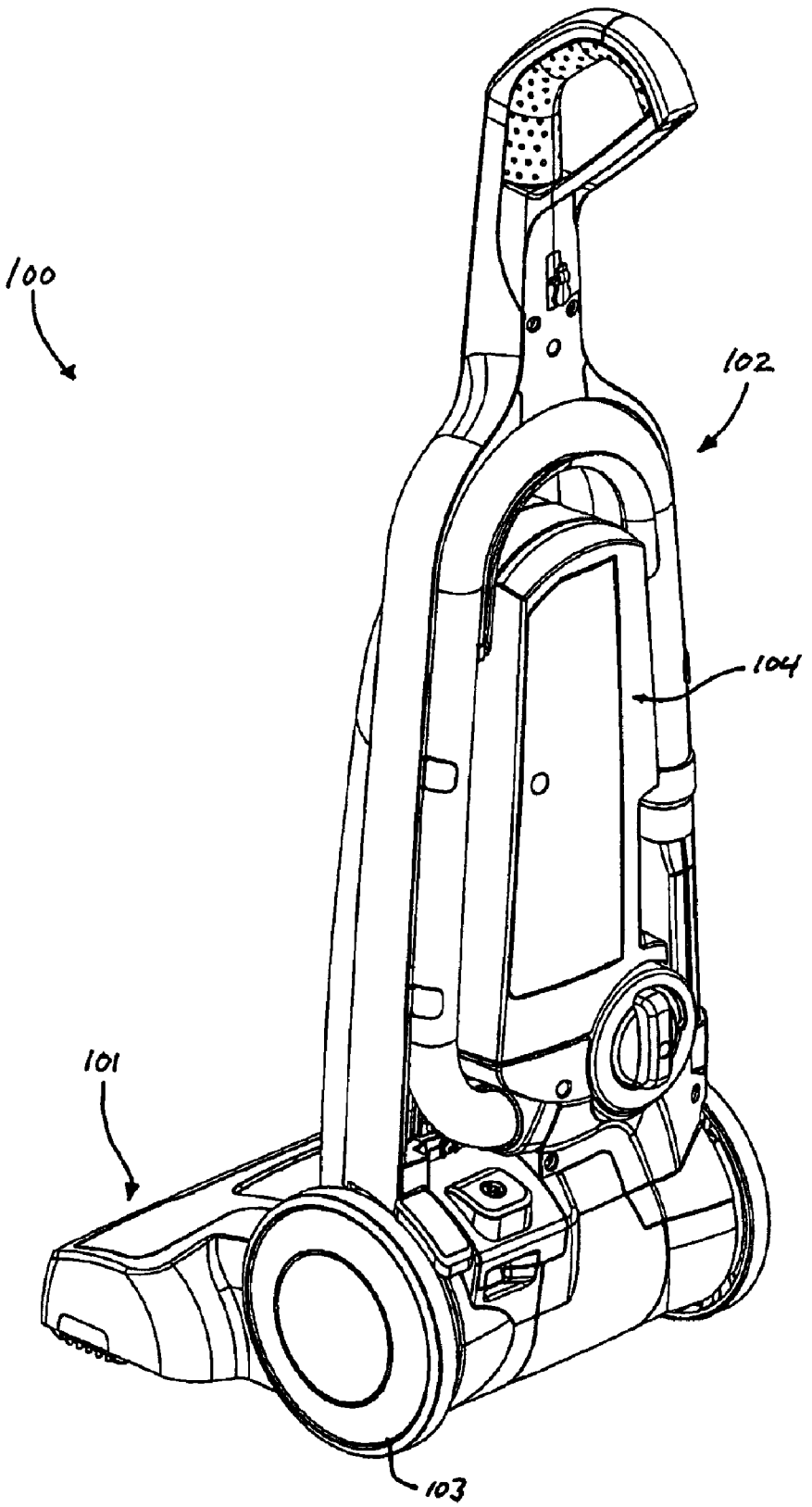


FIG. 3

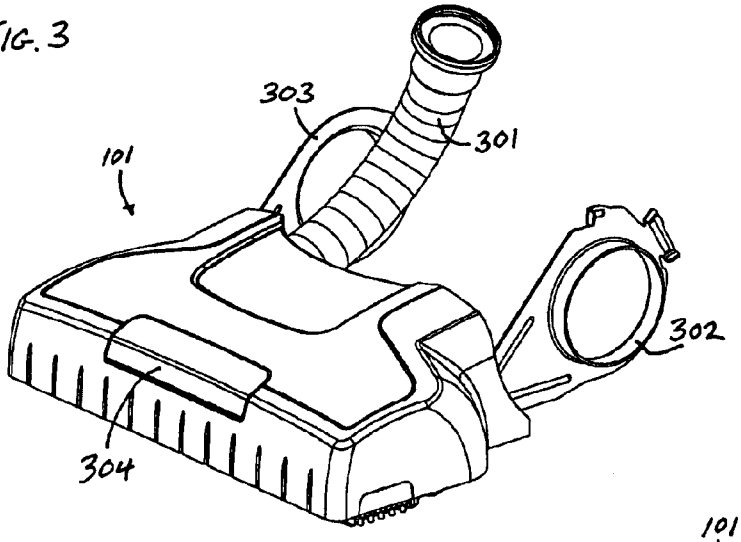


FIG. 4

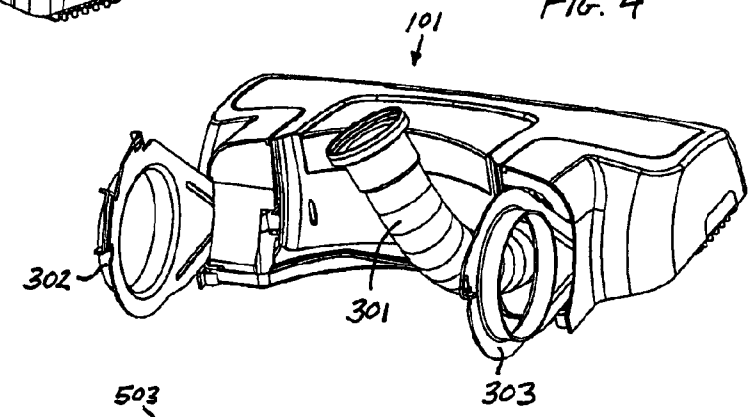
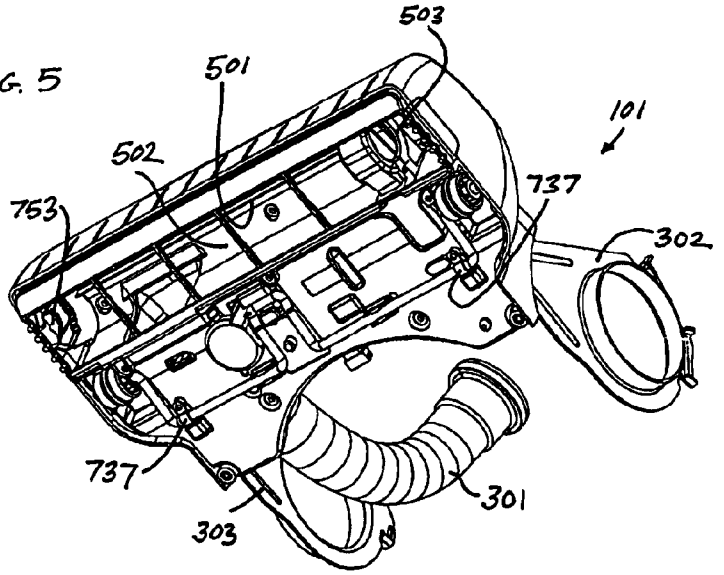


FIG. 5



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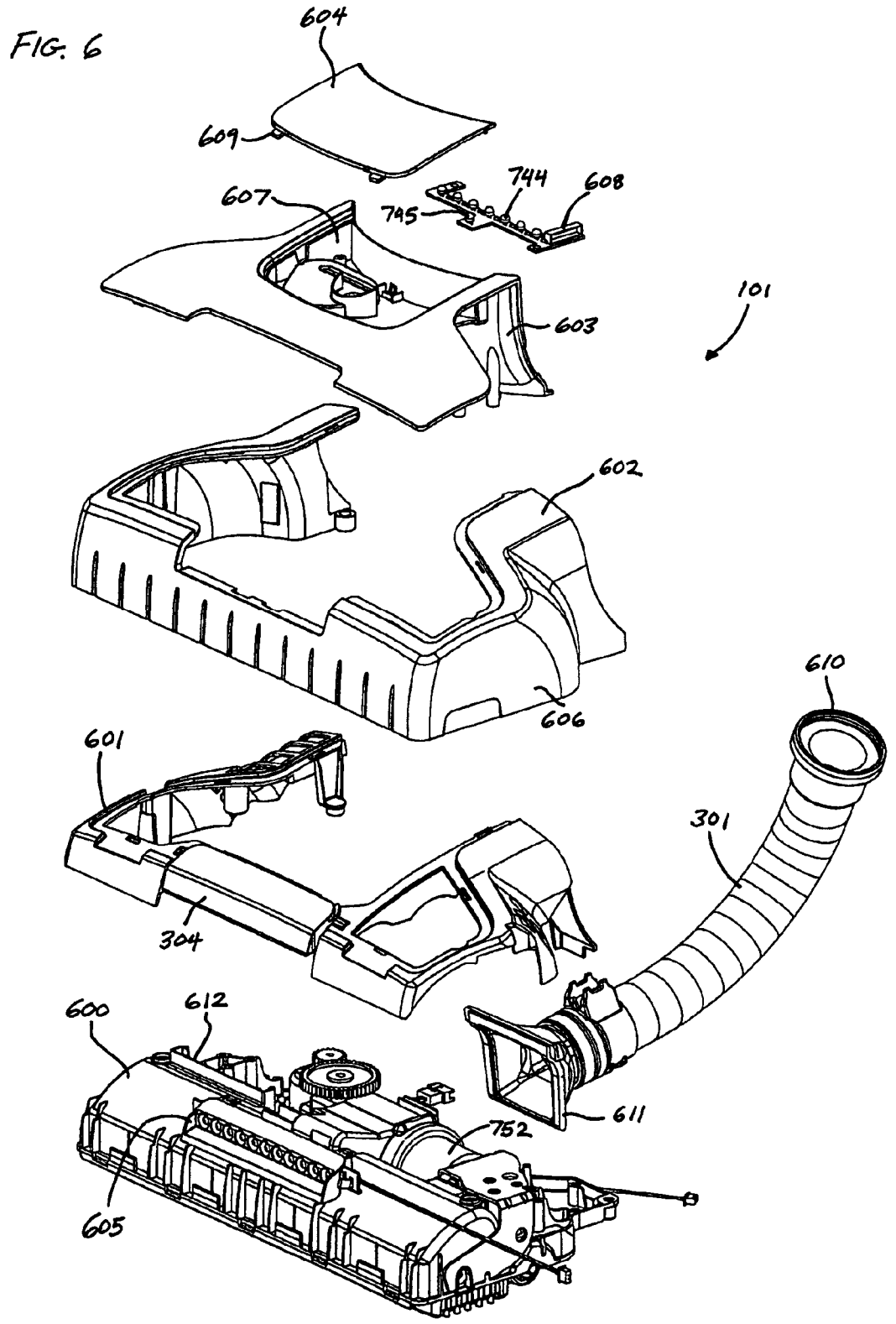
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FIG. 7

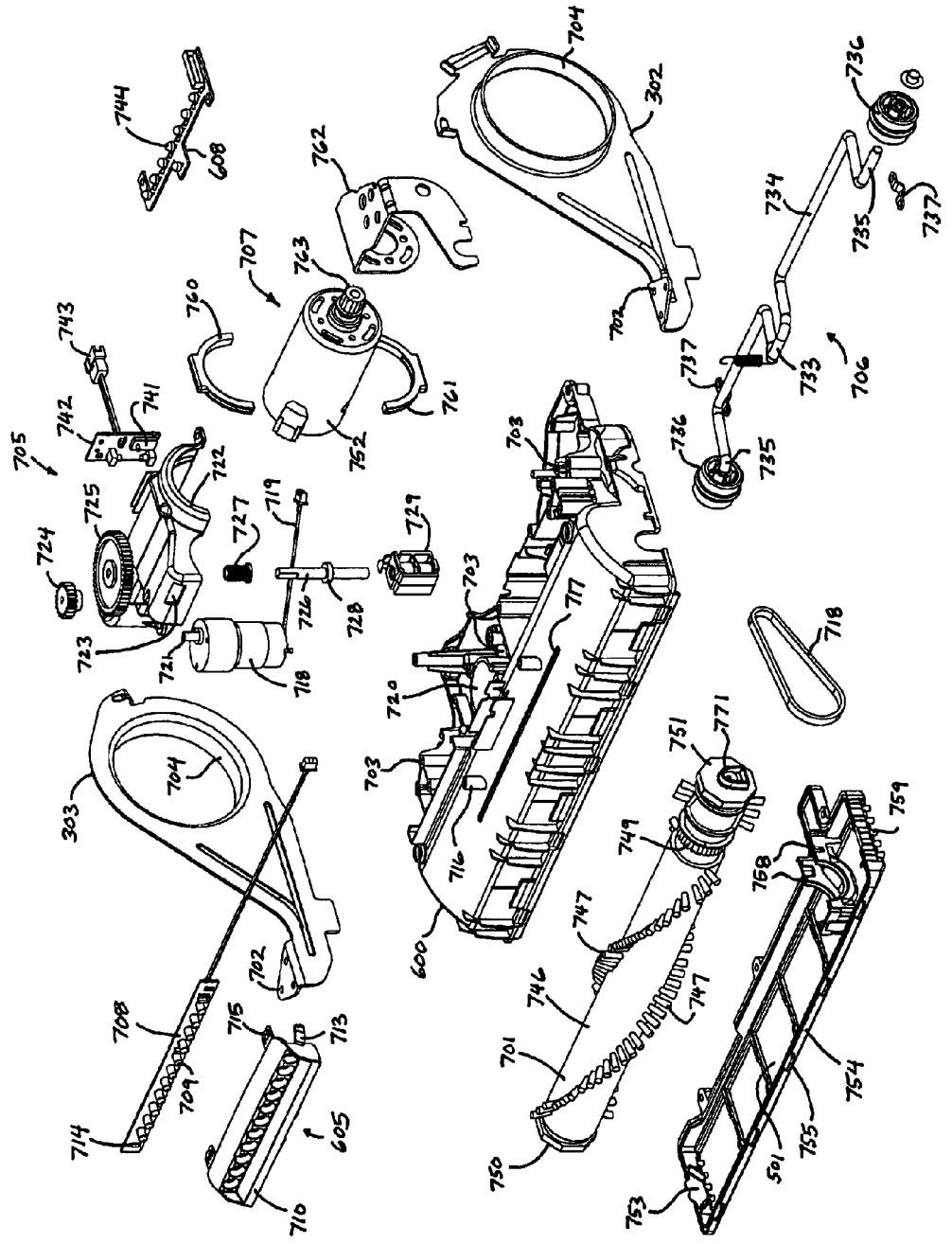
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FIG. 8

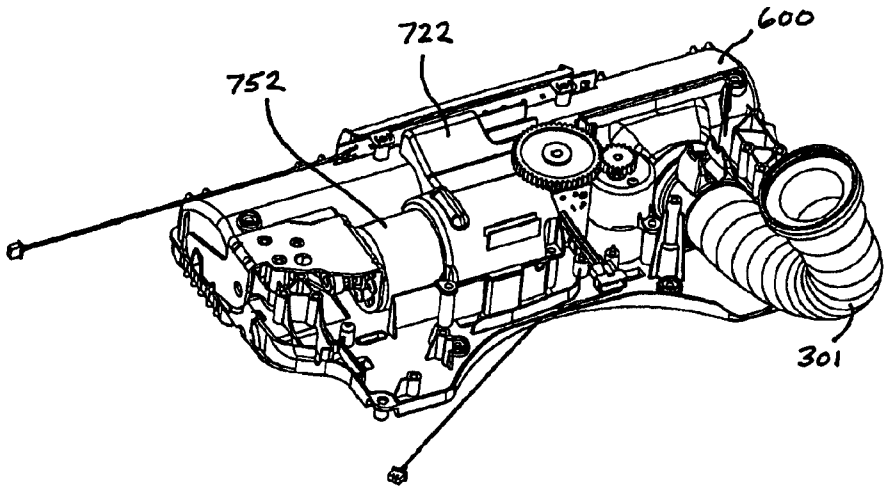
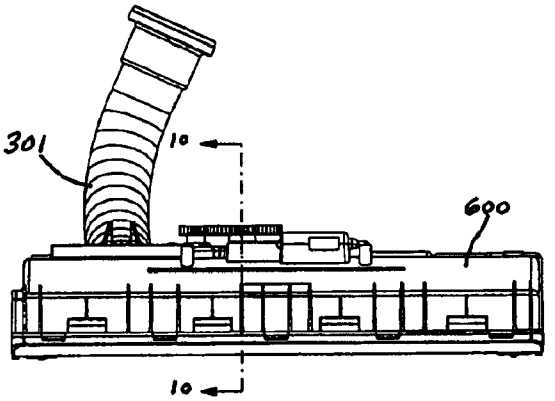


FIG. 9



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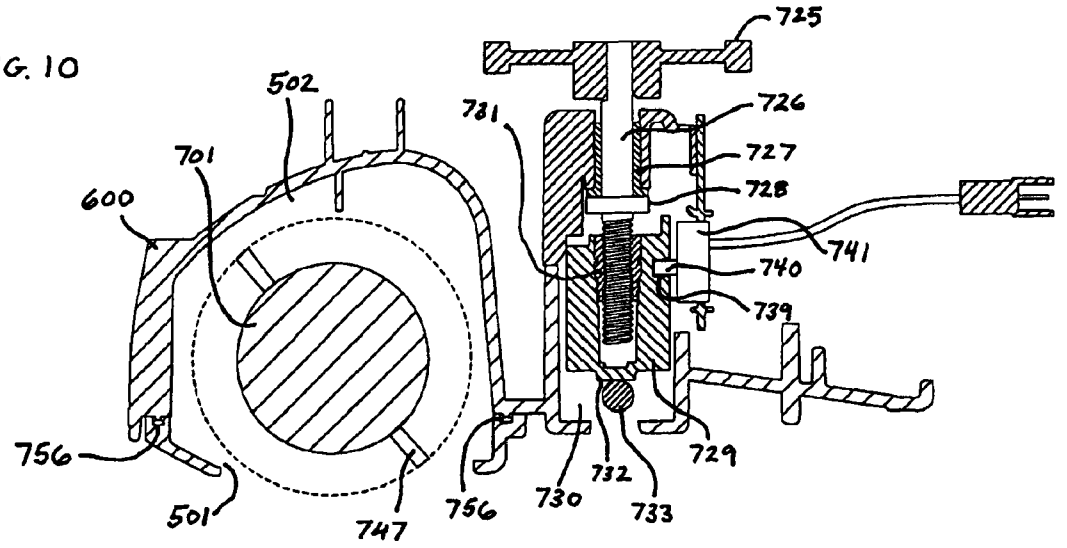

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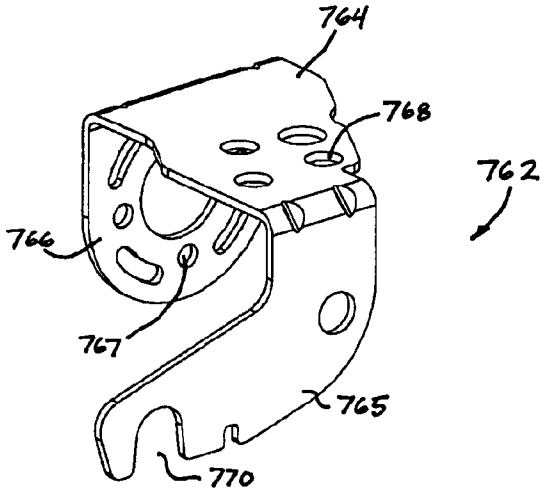


FIG. 12

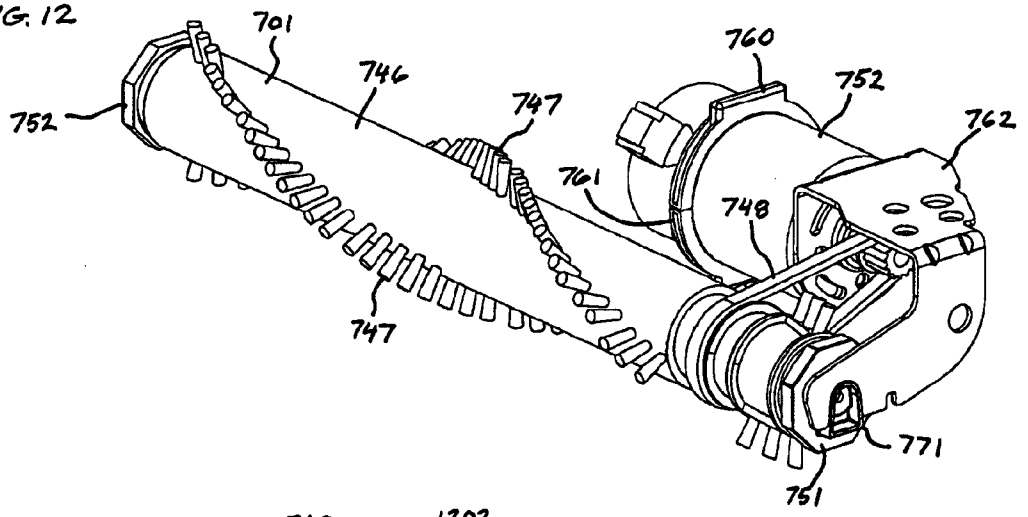
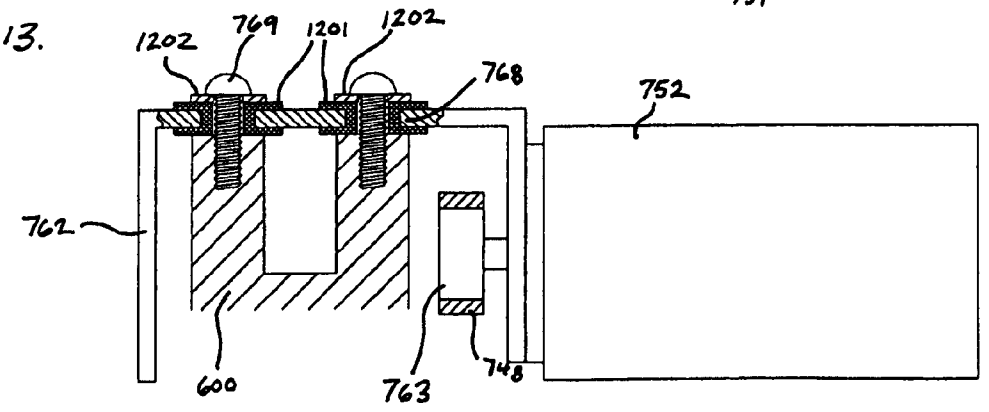


FIG 13.



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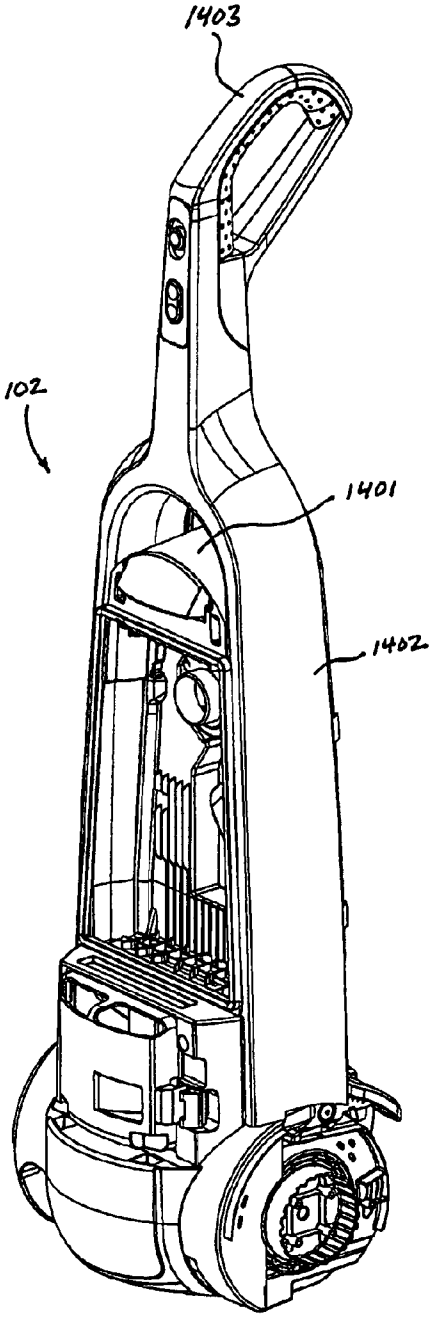

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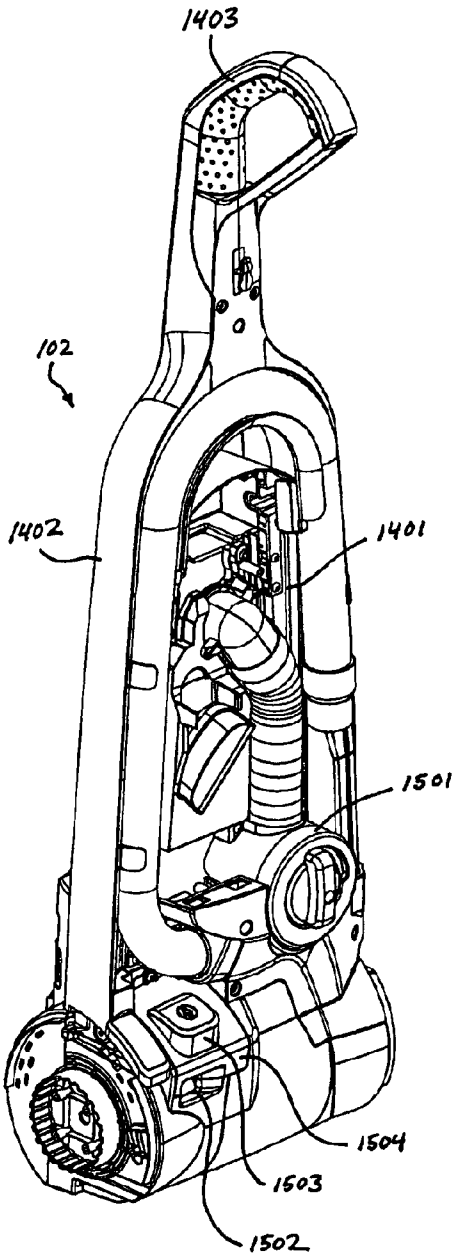

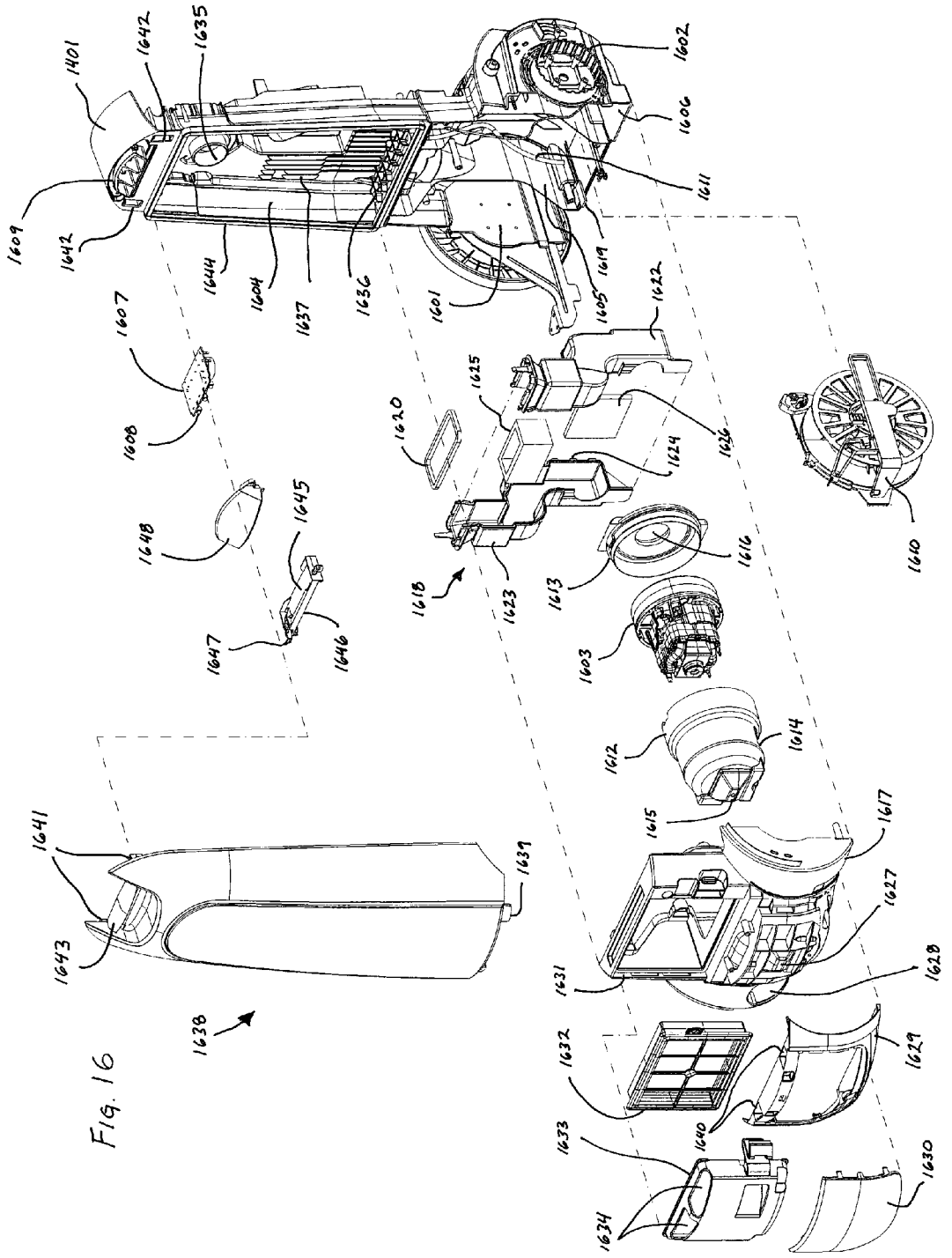
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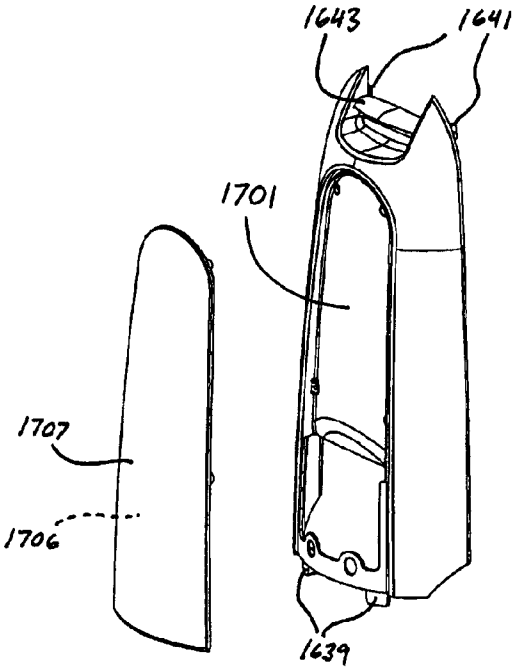
Fig. 16

FIG. 17



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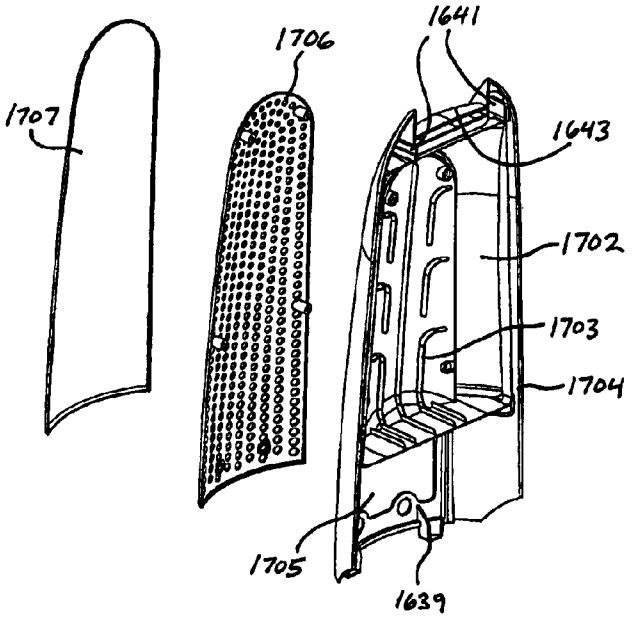

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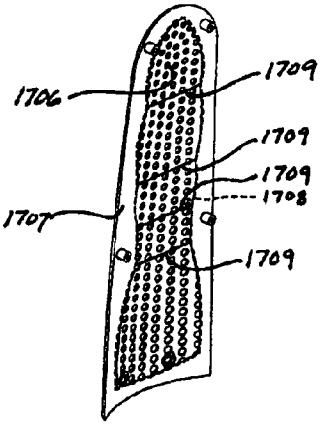

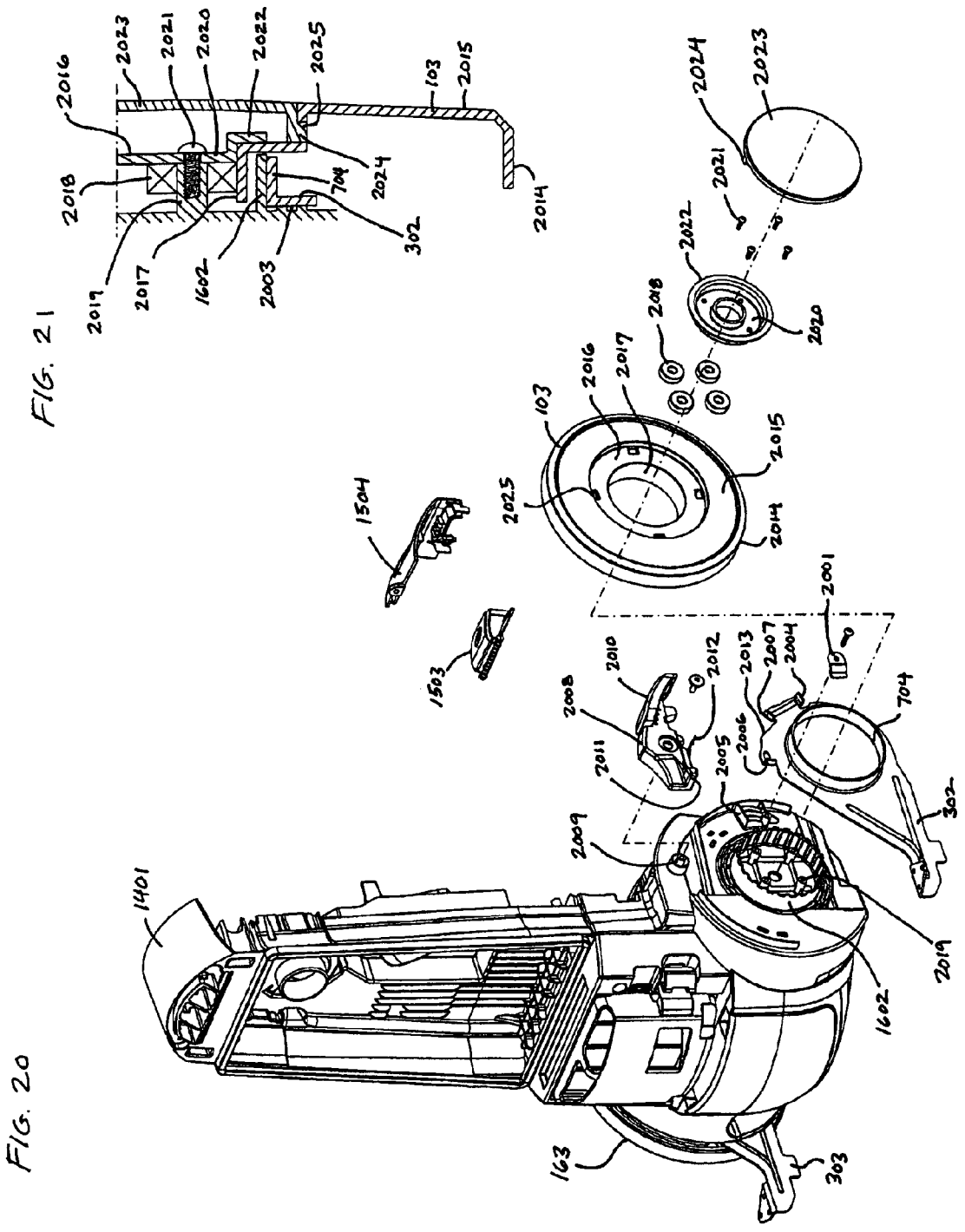
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FIG. 21

FIG. 20

FIG. 22

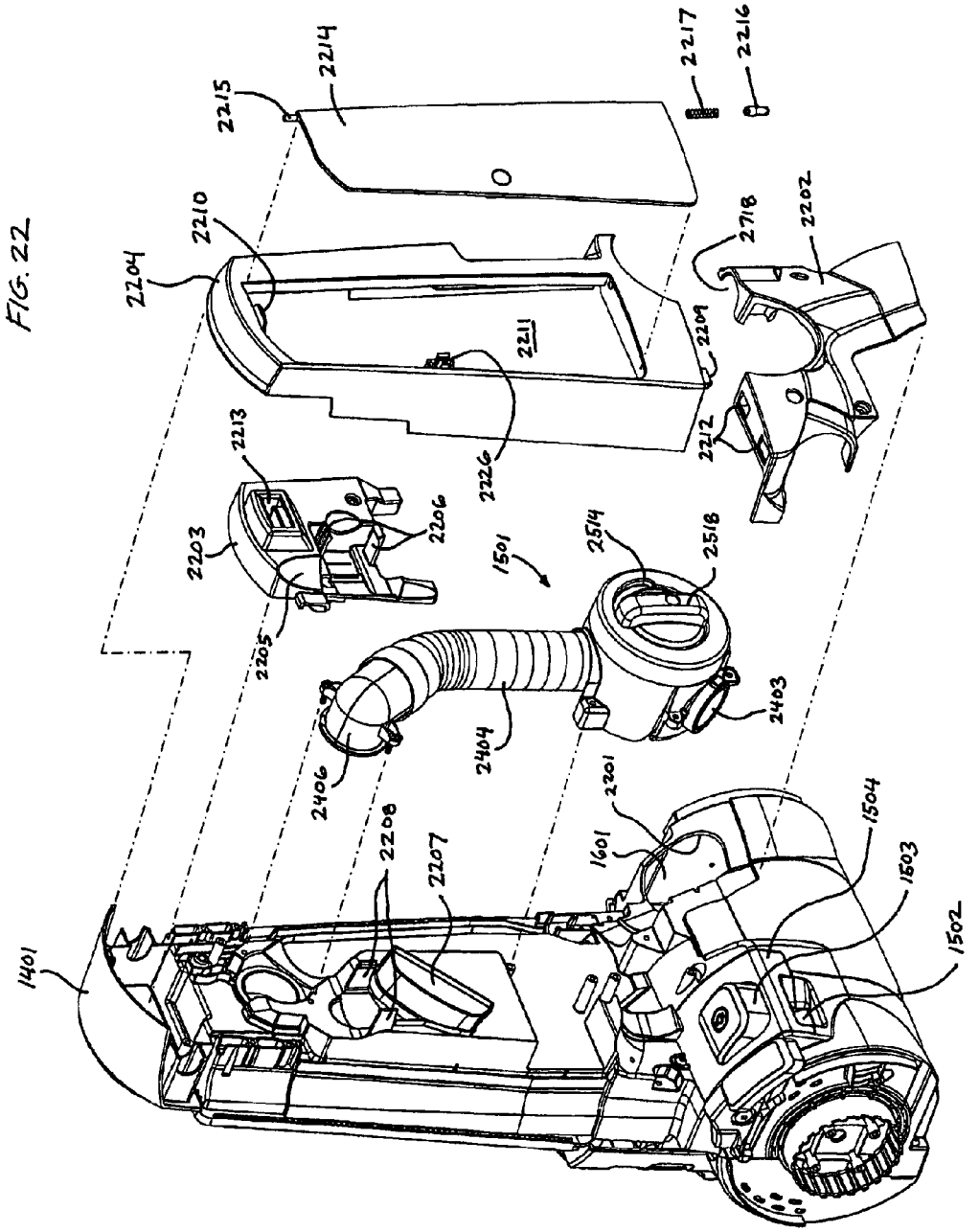
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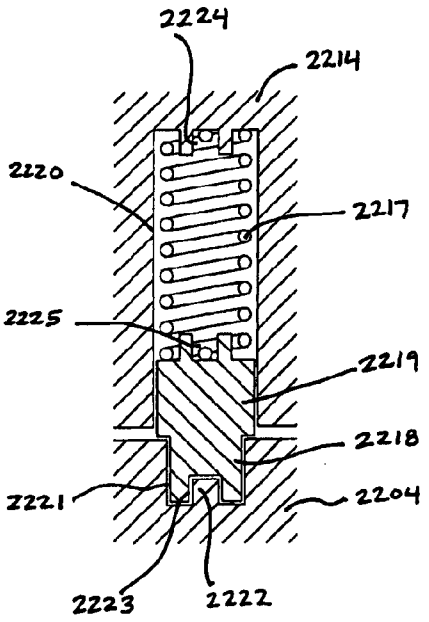
FIG. 23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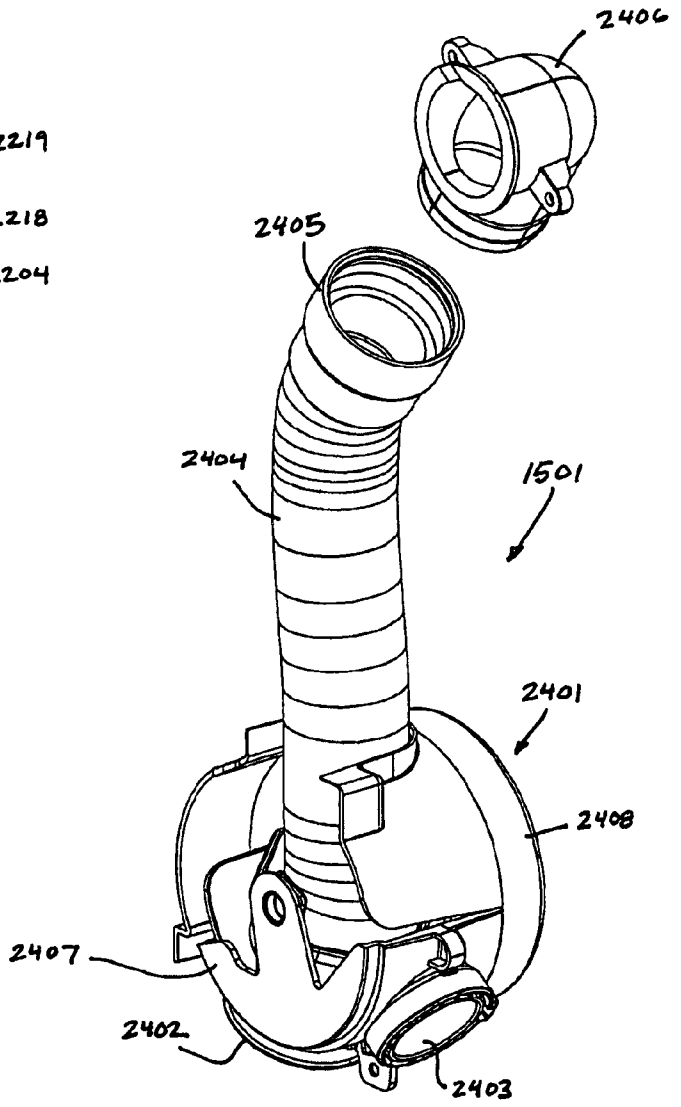
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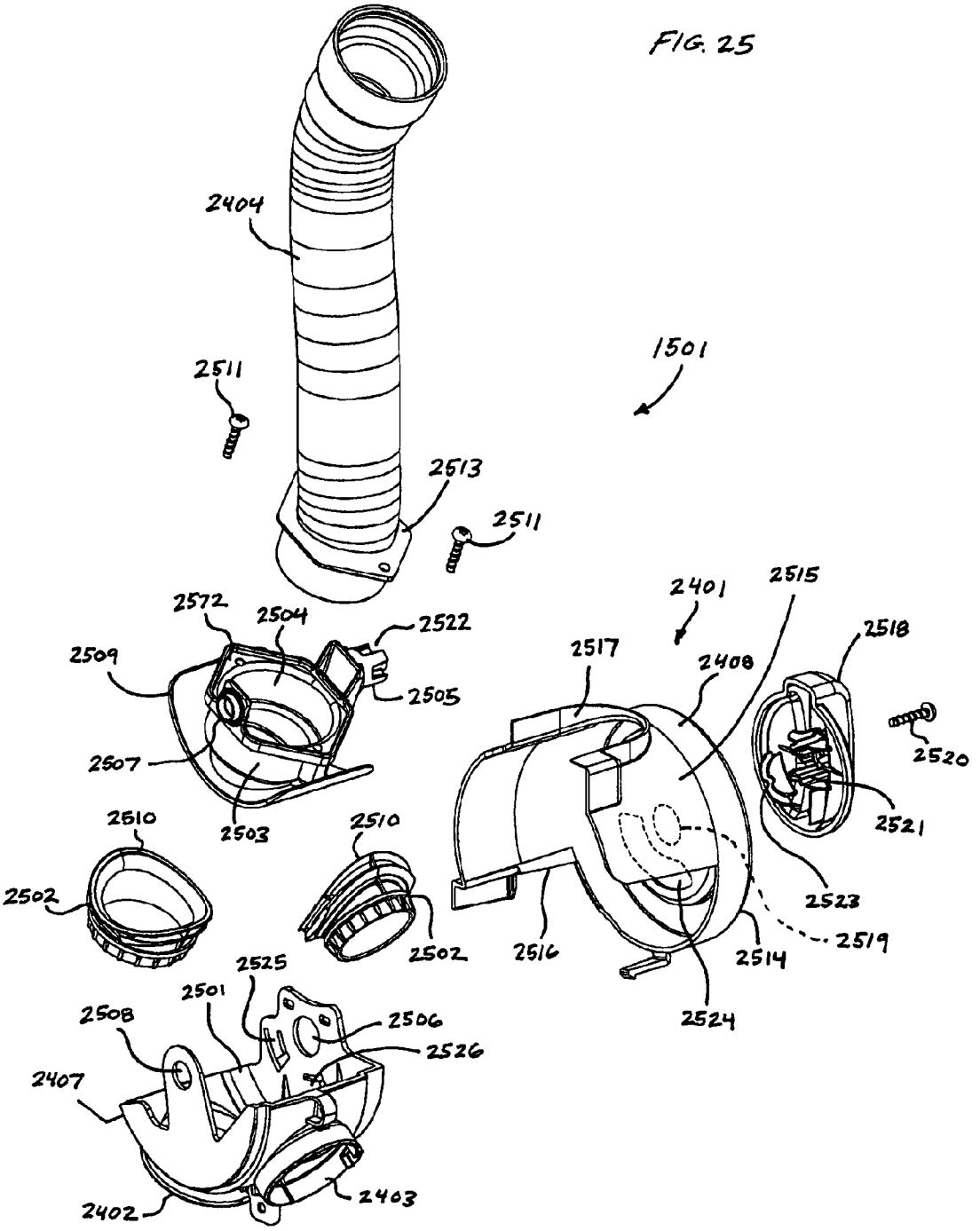
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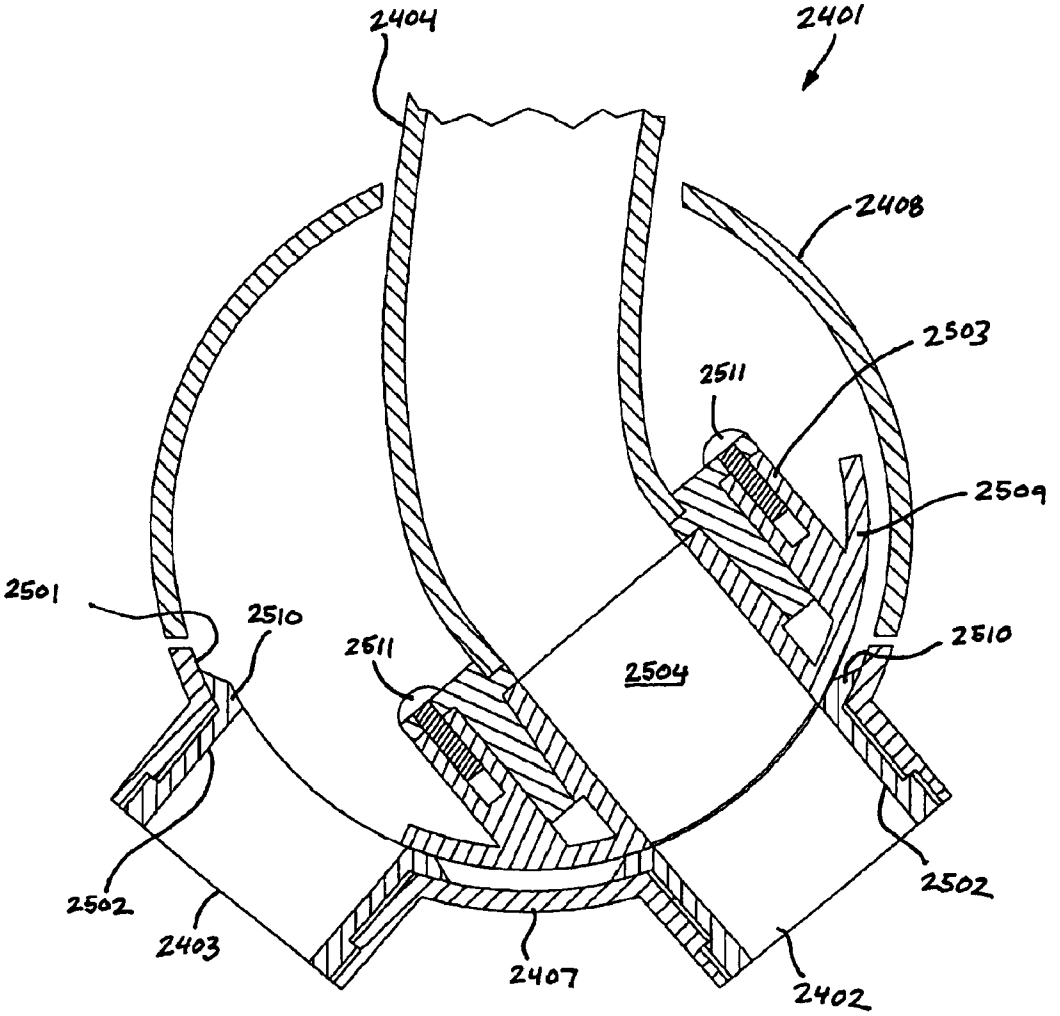
FIG. 26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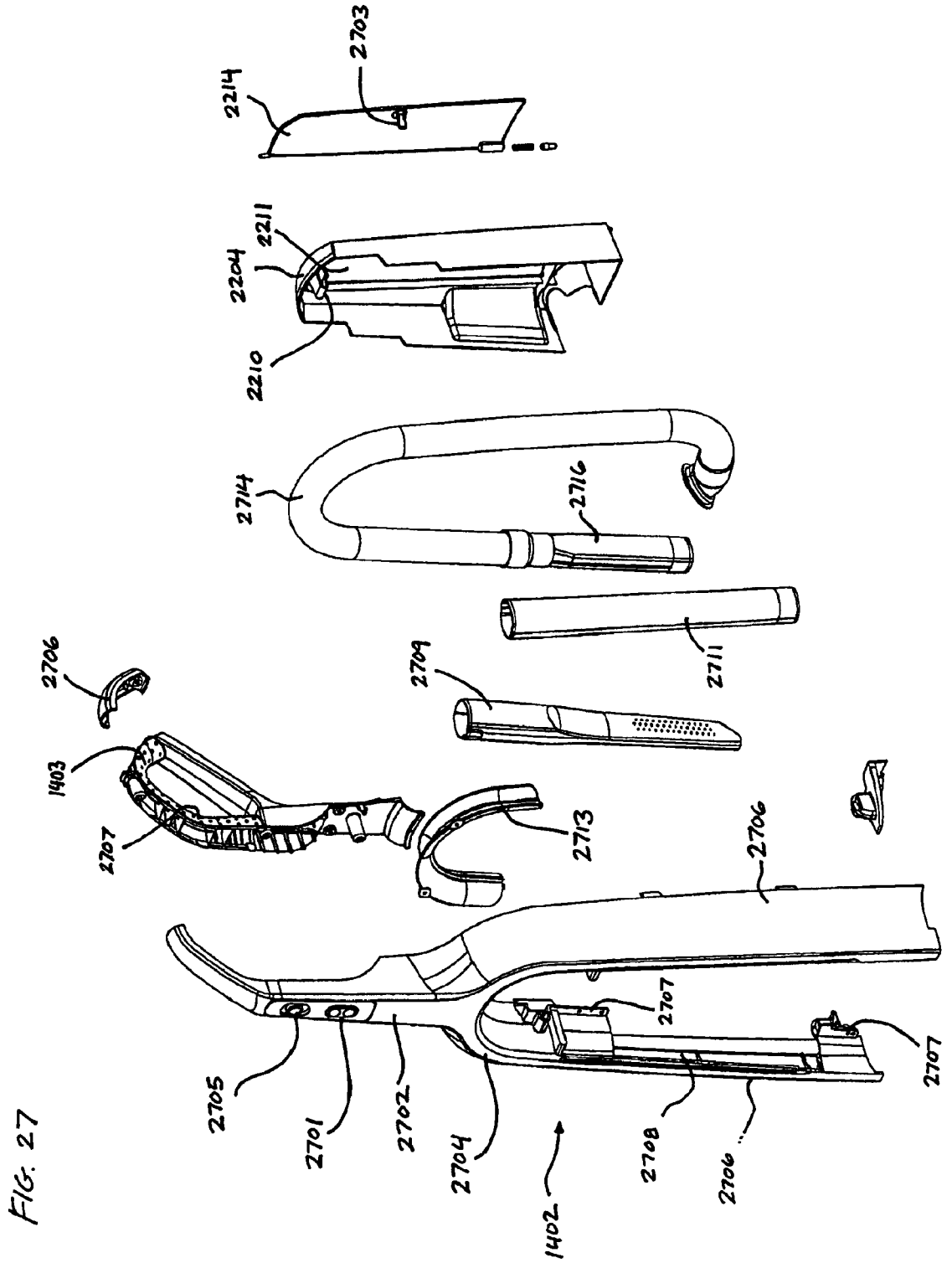
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FIG. 27

FIG. 28

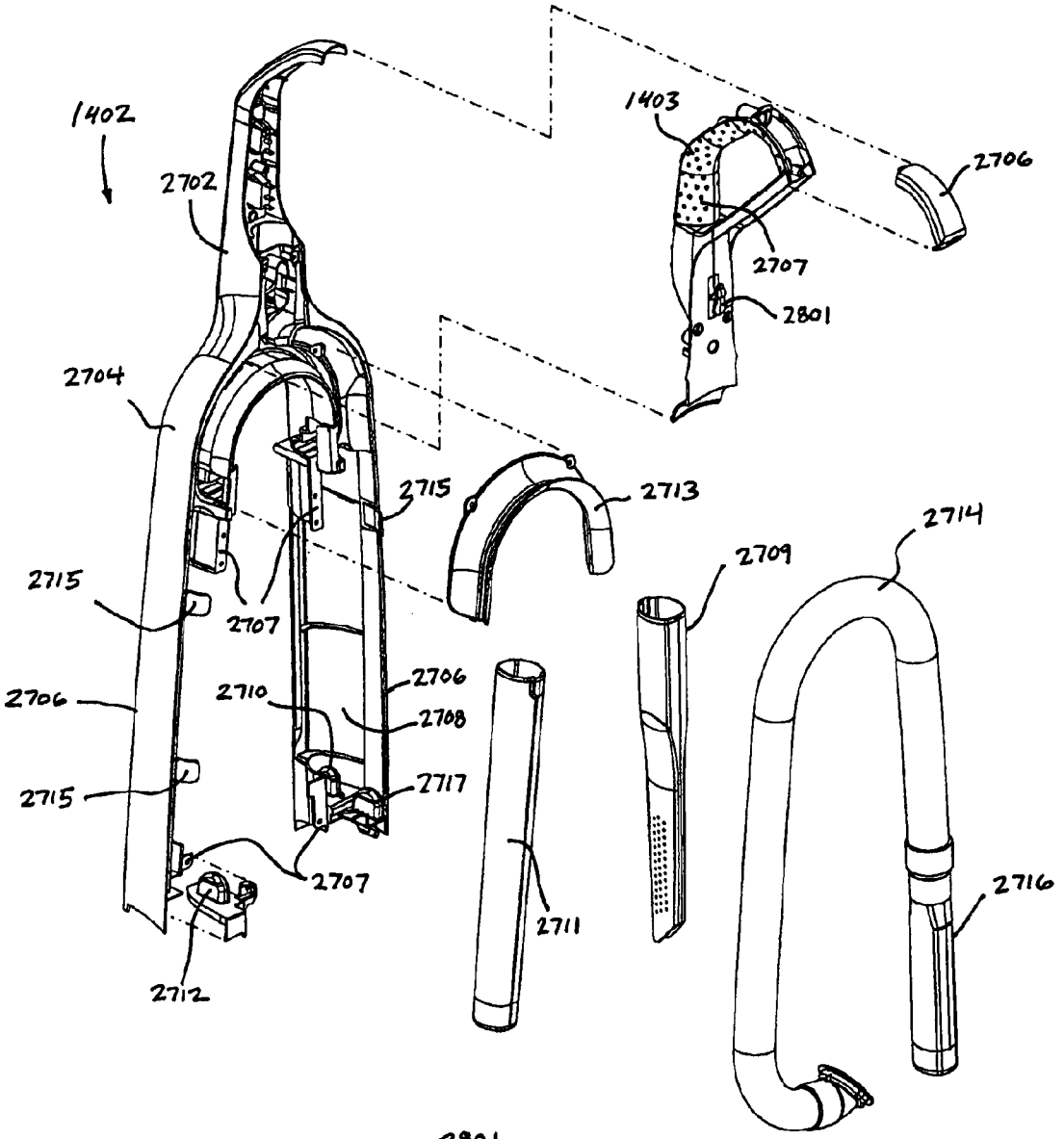
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FIG. 29

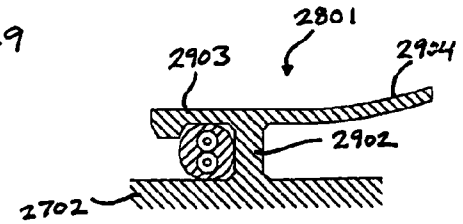
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FIG. 30

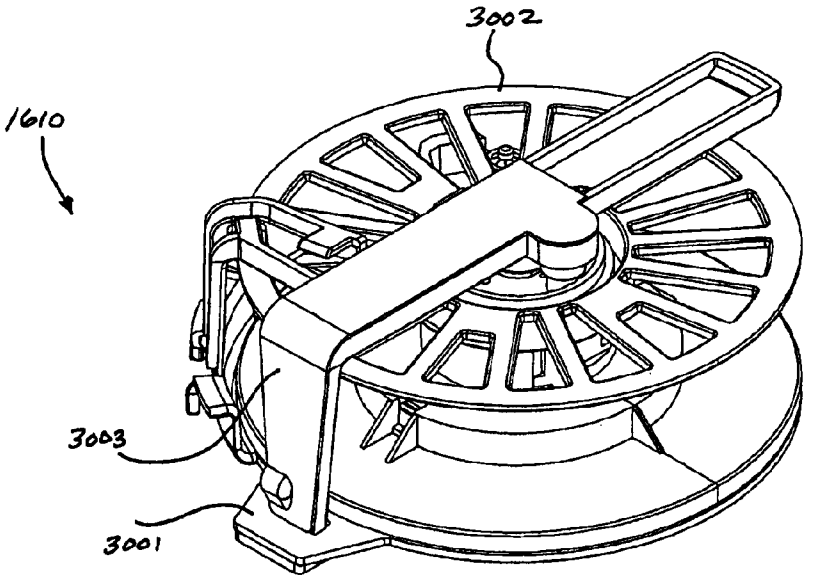
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FIG. 31

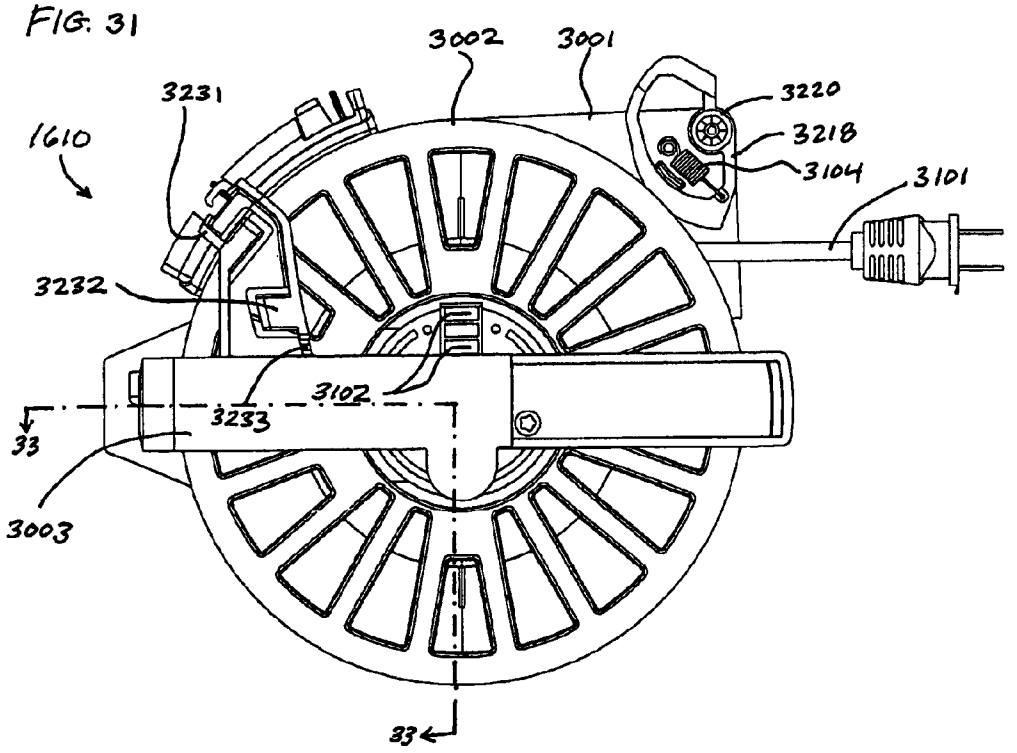
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FIG. 32

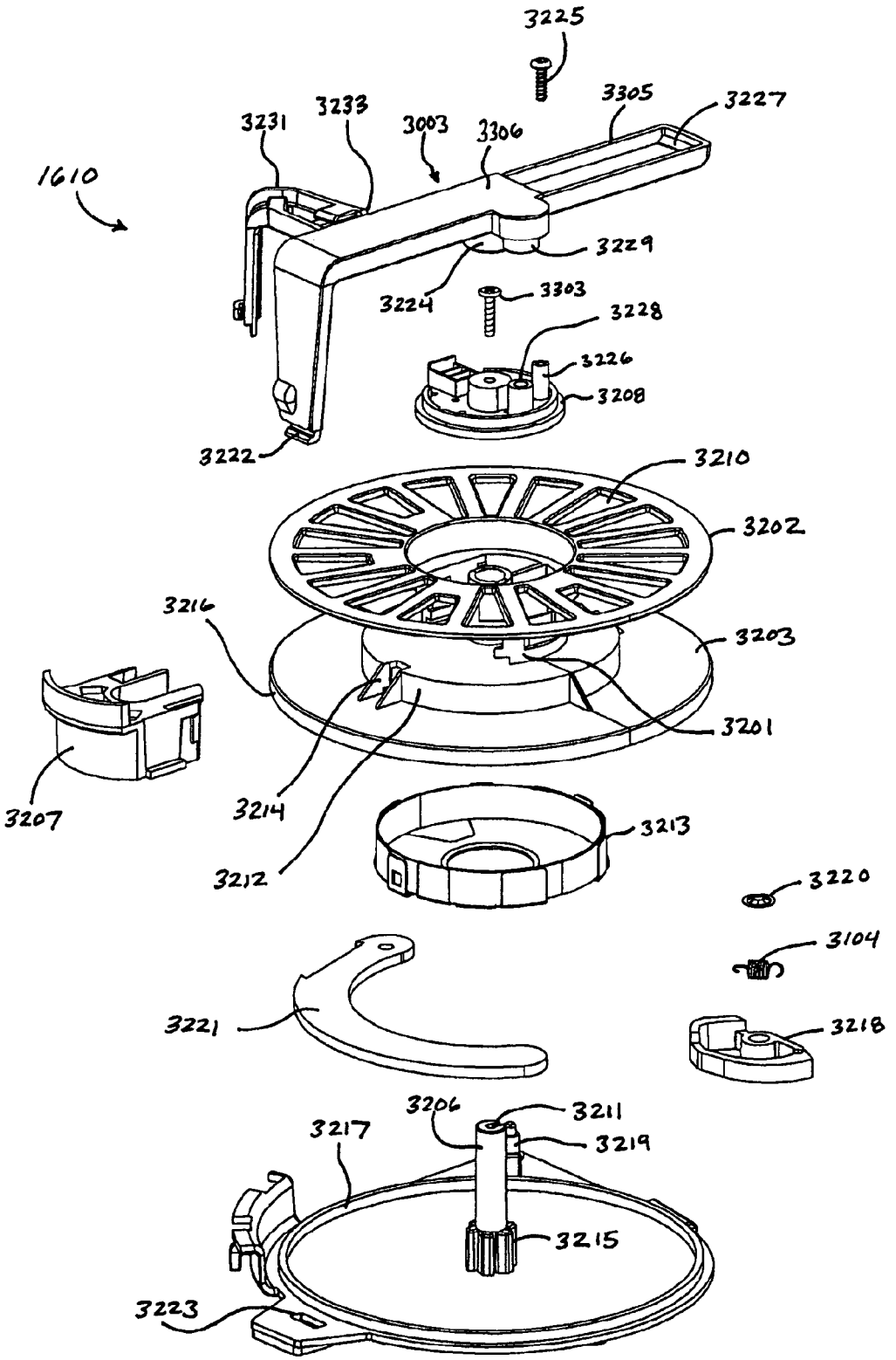
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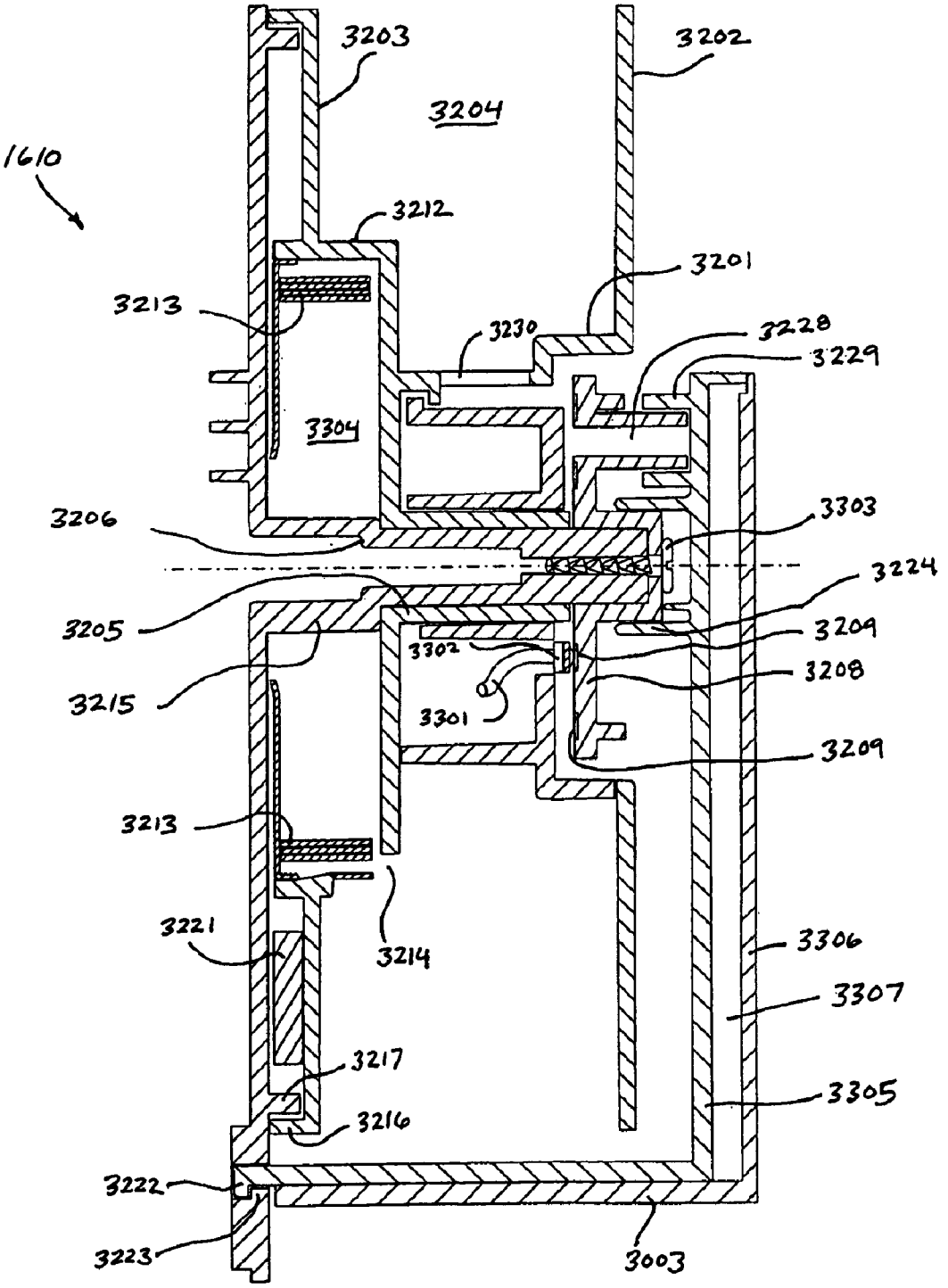
FIG. 33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VACUUM CLEANER DIRT RECEPTACLE AND EXHAUST FILTER COVER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to upright vacuum cleaners.

BACKGROUND

Vacuum cleaning devices, such as upright and canister vacuum cleaners, wet extractors, stick vacuums, electric brooms and other devices, are in widespread use as a tool to clean floors, upholstery, stairs, and other surfaces.

Known vacuum cleaning devices have various features that are intended to improve their cleaning effectiveness. For example, a common feature on upright vacuums is a rotating brushroll, and numerous variations on such brushrolls are known in the art. Another feature is the provision of various types of filtration systems, such as vacuum bags, disposable or reusable filters, cyclone separators, and combinations thereof. Still other features relate to controlling the manner in which the vacuum cleaner addresses the surface being cleaned, such as nozzle height adjustment mechanisms.

Known vacuum cleaning devices are also provided with various features that are directed towards improving user convenience and overall ease of use. For example, various types of accessory tool storage arrangements have been provided, as have retractable cordreels. Still other features have been provided to reduce the noise level of the cleaning device to reduce potential irritation caused thereby.

While the prior art provides various features relating to cleaning effectiveness and user convenience, there still exists a need for improvement in these and other features of vacuum cleaning devices.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a first aspect, the present invention provides a motor and brushroll mounting system for a cleaning device. The mounting system includes a motor, an agitator, a drive system, and a bracket. The motor has a rotary driving component adapted to rotate about a drive axis centerline, and a motor housing. The agitator has a rotary member having a driven component and at least one agitator, and at least one fixed member. The rotary member is rotatably held by the fixed member such that it is rotatable about a driven axis centerline. The drive system operatively connects the driving component and the driven component. The bracket is attached at a first end to the motor housing and at the second end to the at least one fixed member, and extends substantially directly therebetween to substantially prevent relative translation between the drive axis centerline and the driven axis centerline.

In a second aspect, the present invention provides a nozzle for a cleaning device. The nozzle has a housing, an inlet forming an air flow path into the housing, and an agitator chamber adjacent the inlet. The nozzle also has an agitator, a motor, a drive system, and an alignment bracket. The agitator includes a rotary member disposed at least partially within the agitator chamber and having an agitator rotary axis, and a fixed member adapted to pivotally hold the rotary member. The motor is disposed within the housing and has a motor rotary axis. The drive system operatively connects the motor and the rotary member. The alignment bracket mechanically attaches the fixed member to the motor to substantially prevent relative translation between the agitator rotary axis and the motor rotary axis.

In a third aspect, the present invention provides an alignment bracket for cleaning device agitators. The alignment bracket includes a first portion that is adapted to rigidly attach to a motor that is contained in a housing, a second portion that is adapted to rigidly attach to an agitator mount that is contained in a housing, and a third portion extending between the first portion and the second portion. The alignment bracket is separate from the housing that contains the motor and the agitator, and is substantially more rigid than the portion of the housing located between an output shaft of the motor and the agitator mount.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is described in detail with reference to the examples of preferred embodiments shown in the following figures, in which like parts are designated by like reference numerals.

FIG. **1** is a front isometric view of an embodiment of a vacuum cleaner of the present invention.

FIG. **2** is a rear isometric view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIGS. **3** through **5** are various views of the base of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **6** is an exploded view of the base of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **7** is a further exploded view of the base of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **8** is a rear isometric view of the base frame of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **9** is a front view of the base frame of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **10** is a section view as seen along reference line **10-10** of the embodiment of FIG. **9**.

FIG. **11** is an isometric view of an embodiment of an alignment bracket of the present invention.

FIG. **12** is an isometric view of the embodiment of FIG. **11**, shown attached to a brushroll motor and a brushroll.

FIG. **13** is a schematic view of a variation of the embodiment of FIG. **11**, shown mounted to a base frame.

FIGS. **14** and **15** are front and rear isometric views of the rear housing of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **16** is an exploded front view of the rear housing of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIGS. **17** through **19** are isometric assembled and exploded views of the bag cover of the embodiment of FIG. **1**

FIG. **20** is another exploded front view of the rear housing of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **21** is a section view of the wheel mounting arrangement of the embodiment of FIG. **20**.

FIG. **22** is an exploded rear view of the rear housing of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **23** is a section view of the lower pivot arrangement of the embodiment of FIG. **22**.

FIG. **24** is an embodiment of an accessory valve of the present invention.

FIG. **25** is an exploded view of the embodiment of FIG. **24**.

FIG. **26** is a section view of the embodiment of FIG. **24**.

FIG. **27** is an exploded front view of the housing assembly of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **28** is an exploded rear view of the housing assembly of the embodiment of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **29** is a section view of an embodiment of a cord retainer clip of the present invention.

FIG. **30** is an isometric view of an embodiment of a cordreel of the present invention.

FIG. **31** is a side view of the embodiment of FIG. **30**.

FIG. **32** is an exploded view of the embodiment of FIG. **30**.

FIG. **33** is a section view of the embodiment of FIG. **30**, as shown along reference line **33-33** of FIG. **30**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the present invention provides an upright vacuum cleaner **100** having various inventive features. It will be appreciated that, while the preferred embodiment is described and illustrated with reference to an upright vacuum cleaner having a bag-type dirt receptacle, the various features of the invention may be used with any type of cleaning device, such as cyclonic vacuums, canister vacuums, stick vacuums, wet and dry powder extractors, handheld vacuums, and so on.

The vacuum cleaner **100** generally comprises a base **101** to which a rear housing **102** is pivotally attached. The base **101** includes a downward-facing, floor-engaging vacuum inlet nozzle opening **501** (FIG. **5**). The rear housing **102** comprises a generally vertically-extending structure that can be tilted backwards, as explained elsewhere herein, to guide the base **101** across a surface being cleaned. A pair of wheels **103** are affixed to the rear housing **102** (or the base **101**) to facilitate movement of the device. The various working parts of the vacuum cleaner **100** are installed in or on either the base **101** or rear housing **102**. While the description herein provides preferred locations for such parts in either the base **101** or rear housing **102**, it will be understood that these locations are generally interchangeable.

Referring now to FIGS. **3-9**, an embodiment of the vacuum base **101** is illustrated and described in greater detail. The base **101** generally comprises a base frame **600** to which a base subhousing **601** (FIG. **6**), furniture guard **602**, hood **603**, lower display cover **604** and base hose **301** are attached. Left and right mounting brackets **302**, **303** are also mounted to the base frame **600**. Screws, snaps or other suitable fasteners may be used to assemble these parts together.

The base frame **600** comprises a molded plastic part to which the various working parts of the base **101**, are mounted. While the base frame **600** and various other components of the invention are described as plastic moldings or as being made with particular materials or in particular ways, it will be understood that other materials or construction techniques can be used. For example, metal stampings or other constructions may be used. As such, the base frame **600** and other parts of the invention are not limited to the materials and constructions described herein, and the described parts are to be viewed as exemplary embodiments of suitable materials and constructions, which may be modified as understood by those of ordinary skill in the art. The base frame **600** is described in more detail later herein.

The base subhousing **601** comprises molded plastic part that fits over the base frame **600**. A clear headlight lens **304** is attached to (or formed integrally with) the base subhousing **601**, and positioned to overlie a headlight assembly **605**, which is described in detail elsewhere herein. The headlight lens **304** may be a simple clear plastic part, or it may be shaped to provide light diffusion or focusing characteristics for the headlight assembly **605**. For example, the headlight lens **304** may be provided with fresnel lens surfaces to focus the light from the headlight assembly **605**.

The furniture guard **602** comprises a molded plastic part that fits over the base subhousing **601** and base frame **600**. The furniture guard **602** has a skirt-like periphery **606** that extends around the front and sides of the base subhousing **601** and base frame **600** to conceal these parts and provide a pleasing outer appearance. The furniture guard **602** may also include overmolded or molded-in-place, non-marking, rubber bumpers located around its periphery **606** to help prevent the base **101** from scuffing or otherwise damaging furniture, baseboards, walls, or other surfaces that it may contact during use.

The hood **603** is mounted to the upper portion of the furniture guard **602**, and covers the interior of the base **101**. The hood **603** includes a depressed portion that forms a display housing **607**. A lower display board **608** is installed in the display housing **607** by screws (not shown) or other fastening means, such at snap-fit tabs. The display housing **607** includes a passage (not shown) that allows wired to pass to the lower display board **608**. The features and function of the lower display board **608** are described in detail elsewhere herein. The use of a separate hood **603** and furniture guard **602**, rather than molding the same as part of the furniture guard **602**, provides the opportunity to form the base **101** with multiple differently-colored parts to provide a pleasing aesthetic appearance, but is not required.

The lower display cover **604** covers the display housing **607** portion of the hood **603**. The lower display cover **604** preferably comprises a clear plastic part that snaps into place by the use of tabs **609**, screws, or other fitment means. In one embodiment, the entire lower display cover **604** is clear, but in other embodiments, only the portion of the lower display cover **604** that overlies the lower display board **608** is clear. As with the headlight lens **304**, the lower display cover **604** may form a simple, flat window, or it may be shaped to provide light diffusion or focusing characteristics for the lower display board **608**.

The base hose **301** comprises a flexible hose having a hose connector **610** at its distal end (the end remote from the base **101**, when assembled), and a inlet nozzle adapter **611** at its proximal end. When the vacuum cleaner **100** is assembled, the base hose **301** passes through a hose slot **1601** in the rear housing **102** (FIG. **16**), and attaches to a floor inlet **2402** on an accessory valve **1501**, as described in more detail elsewhere herein. The inlet nozzle adapter **611** comprises a generally square flange (although other shapes may be used) that slides into a corresponding slot **612** on the base frame **600**. The nozzle adapter **611** is held in place by snap fittings or screws, or may be captured by other parts, such as the base subhousing **601** and/or furniture guard **602**. As shown most clearly in FIG. **5**, when installed, the nozzle adapter **611** is located adjacent a brushroll chamber **502** that is formed in the lower surface of the base frame **600**. The brushroll **701** (FIGS. **7**, **10** and **12**) is omitted from FIG. **5** to clarify this feature.

The mounting brackets **302**, **303** are preferably constructed as stamped or cast metal parts, such as steel stampings, so that they can have the slimmest possible profile while still being strong enough to form a pivoting joint between the base **101** and the rear housing **102**. Of course, other suitable materials may be used, and it is not strictly necessary to minimize the size of the brackets **302**, **303**. Each mounting bracket **302**, **303** is attached to the base frame **600** by three screws (not shown). As shown in FIG. **7**, the screws pass through a triangular pattern of three screw holes **702** on each bracket **302**, **303**, and thread into corresponding screw bosses **703** on the base frame **600**. Each bracket includes a cylindrical flange **704** that forms a pivot surface that fits over a corresponding base mounting boss **1602** on the rear housing **102**, as described in more detail with reference to FIG. **20**.

Referring now more specifically to FIGS. **7** and **8**, the base frame **600** and the parts attached thereto are described in more detail. As noted before, the base frame **600** is constructed as a molded part having the brushroll chamber **502** formed in its

bottom surface. Various parts are attached to the base frame **600**. Among these are the headlight assembly **605**, a nozzle height adjustment assembly **705**, a wheel carriage assembly **706**, a brushroll **701**, and a brushroll motor assembly **707**.

The headlight assembly **605** comprises a printed circuit board **708** having a plurality of light emitting diodes (LEDs) **709**, which are arranged in a line or other pattern, and a reflector **710**. The printed circuit board **708** is attached to the electrical system of the vacuum cleaner by way of an electrical lead **711** that contains the wires necessary to operate the LEDs **709**. The LEDs **709** may comprise any commercially available LED of any color, but preferably all have the same wavelength. The LEDs **709** are preferably generally white in color, which is expected to provide relatively natural-looking lighting of the surface being cleaned. In order to provide multiple different lighting levels, the LEDs **709** may be activated individually or in groups. For example, half of the LEDs **709** may be lit to provide a medium light intensity, while all of the LEDs **709** may be lit to provide the brightest light intensity. The LEDs **709** may also be lit in smaller groups, or even one at a time, to provide even greater gradations in the light intensity.

While the use of LEDs **709** of the same wavelength is preferred, the LEDs may alternatively be selected with different colors that provide a unique light signature on the surface being cleaned. If LEDs having various different colors are provided, these may be activated separately to provide their native color, or in combination with one another to overlap and provide combined colors. For example, red, blue and green LEDs can be combined to generate a white light.

The reflector **710** preferably comprises a reflective material or has a reflective coating applied to it. The reflector **710** has a series of holes **712** through which the LEDs **709** project when assembled. Each hole **712** is preferably surrounded by a depression having a parabolic or other shape that forms a focusing lens to help project light from the LEDs **709** in a generally forward direction. These focusing lenses may also be shaped to project the light from the LEDs **709** in a fan-shaped pattern in front of the vacuum cleaner, downward, upward, or in various other patterns. For example, one or more focusing lenses at each end of the reflector **710** may be shaped to focus light from their respective LEDs **709** out towards opposite sides of the device, while the remaining ones focus the LED light directly forward and down at a slight angle. This pattern may be useful for general cleaning. Such variations in the light pattern may also be provided by changing the pattern, orientations and/or locations of the LEDs **709**, and other variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure and with practice of the invention.

The reflector **710** includes tangs **713** that snap into corresponding slots **714** in the printed circuit board **708**, and help hold the reflector **710** in the proper location relative to the LEDs **709**. The reflector **710** also includes mounting holes **715** through which screws (not shown) are passed to attach the headlight assembly **605** to screw bosses **716** on the base frame **600**. The base frame **600** also includes a slot or indentation **717**, which receives the bottom edge of the printed circuit board **708**, and acts to further stabilize the LEDs **709**.

The nozzle height adjustment assembly **705** and a wheel carriage assembly **706** are also attached to the base frame **600**. The nozzle height adjustment assembly **705** comprises an electric height adjusting motor **718**, which is powered by electrical lead **719**. The height adjusting motor **718** is mounted in a pocket **720** in the base frame **600**, and oriented with its output shaft **721** aligned generally vertically (i.e., perpendicular to the ground). A motor cover assembly **722** encloses the top of the height adjusting motor **718**. The pocket **720** and motor cover assembly **722** preferably form an enclosure having an air vent (not visible) located at one end of the height adjusting motor **718**, and a vacuum bleed hole **723** at the other end of the height adjusting motor **718**. The vacuum bleed hole **723** is fluidly connected to the fan/motor **1603** (FIG. **16**) by a vacuum hose (not shown) so that the vacuum fan draws in any carbon dust generated by the height adjusting motor **718**, and filters it from the atmosphere.

The output shaft **721** extends through a hole (not visible) in the motor cover assembly **722**, and a toothed drive gear **724** is attached to the end of the output shaft **721**. The portion of the output shaft **721** that fits within the drive gear **724** and the hole in the drive gear **724** are D-shaped, splined or otherwise shaped to provide a non-rotatable interface between the two parts. A simple press fit may be used to hold the drive gear **724** in place, or it may be further held by a key, pin, or other known device. Of course, other gear mounting methods and structures may be used.

Referring now more specifically to FIG. **10**, the drive gear **724** is located adjacent to, and in toothed engagement with, a toothed driven gear **725**. The driven gear **725** is connected to a height adjusting screw **726** in the same or similar manner as the drive gear **724** is attached to the motor's output shaft **721** (e.g., by press fit over a D-shaped portion of the height adjusting screw **726**). The height adjusting screw **726** extends downwardly through the motor cover assembly **722**, and is pivotally journaled in a brass bushing **727** that is pressed into the motor cover assembly **722**. A shoulder **728** on the height adjusting screw **726** prevents the height adjusting screw **726** from moving upwards through the motor cover assembly **722**. The bottom of the height adjusting screw **726** comprises a threaded shaft, which engages a correspondingly threaded adjustment block **729**.

The adjustment block **729** comprises a generally cubic block that is adapted to slidably fit within a corresponding pocket **730** in the base frame **600**. A threaded insert **731**, which is preferably made of a steel or another wear-resistant material, is anchored in the adjustment block **729**, and sized to receive and threadingly engage the threaded shaft of the height adjusting screw **726**. Using this arrangement, the motor **718** can be used to rotate the height adjusting screw **726**, and thereby raise and lower the adjustment block **729** within the pocket **730**. The lower surface **732** of the adjustment block **729** engages a crosspiece **733** on the wheel carriage assembly **706**.

Referring back to FIGS. **5** and **7**, the wheel carriage assembly **706** comprises a wire axle **734** that is bent at each end to form wheel mounts **735**, and in the middle to form a crosspiece **733**. Each wheel mount **735** has a wheel **736** pivotally mounted to it and held in place by a pushnut, as known in the art. The axle **734** is attached to the bottom surface of the base frame **600** by two axle clamps **737**, as best shown in FIG. **5**, and is pivotable relative to the base frame **600** about the axis of the axle **734** where it is held by the clamps **737**. When so mounted, the crosspiece **733** is located adjacent the lower surface **732** of the adjustment block **729**. The crosspiece **733** is held in engagement with the lower surface **732** by a spring **738** that is connected to both the crosspiece **733** and the base frame **600**. The crosspiece **733** and the wheel mounts **735** are offset from the pivot axis of the wheel carriage assembly, and so the vertical movement of the adjustment block **729** causes the wheels **736** to move towards or away from the base frame **600**, thereby adjusting the height of the inlet nozzle opening **501** (FIGS. **5** and **10**) relative to the surface that the wheels **736** are resting on.

The height adjusting motor **718** may comprise any type of motor that can be selectively operated in either rotational direction, such as a servo motor, and electronics may be provided to operate the motor **718**. In a preferred embodiment, the height adjusting motor **718** is controlled be a hand-operated control **2701** located on the vacuum's grip post **2702** (FIG. **27**). The motor **718** may alternatively be controlled by a switch located somewhere other than the grip post **2702**, such as by a footswitch on the base **101**, or may be operated automatically, as known in the art. A combination of controllers may also be used to operate the height adjusting motor **718**. For example, a hand-operable switch may be used to control the motor **718** during floor cleaning operations, but a control circuit may automatically lower the wheels **736** (i.e., raise the nozzle) when an obstruction is detected in the air flow path, or when an accessory cleaning mode is activated.

The height adjusting assembly **705** also preferably includes devices to prevent it from being damaged by over-rotation, and a display system to indicate the height of the inlet nozzle. To this end, the adjustment block **729** includes a slot **739** located in one vertical side thereof. The slot **739** is positioned to receive an actuating arm **740** of a slide potentiometer **741**, as shown in FIG. **10**. As the adjustment block **729** is raised and lowered in its pocket **730**, the actuating arm **740** is moved up and down, causing the resistance of the slide potentiometer **741** to change. This change in resistance is measured by a control circuit located in a circuit board **742** and used deactivate the height adjusting motor **718** when the adjustment block **729** is at the limits of its desired travel. This prevents the operator from damaging the motor **718**, gears **724**, **725**, or other parts by attempting to operate the motor **718** when it is not possible for the adjustment block **729** to move any farther. The limits of travel may be pre-set at the factory, and may also be field-serviceable to allow an operator to recalibrate the resistance scale. The travel limits may alternatively be measured by detecting the change in current experienced by the height adjusting motor **718** as it abuts the limits of its travel, by limit switches separate from the potentiometer **741**, or by other suitable means.

The height adjusting assembly **705** also uses the variable resistance potentiometer **741** to indicate the height of the nozzle inlet on the lower display board **608**, which is attached to the circuit board **742** by an electrical lead **743**. The lower display board **608** preferably comprises a plurality of LEDs **744** that are arranged in a row. As the resistance changes, the control circuit illuminates the LEDs **744** to indicate the inlet nozzle height. The height may be displayed in relative terms (low, medium-low, medium, high, etc.), or absolute terms (1/16 inch, 1/8 inch, 1/4 inch, etc.). Suitable textual or graphic height indicators are printed adjacent the LEDs **744** on the display housing **607**, the lower display cover **604**, or directly on the lower display board **608**.

The lower display board **608** may also be have other indicators or functions. For example, in the shown embodiment, the lower display board **608** also includes a fault indicating LED **745** that indicates if there is a problem operating the height adjusting motor **718**. The fault LED **745** is a dual color (preferably blue and red) LED that illuminates when the brushroll **701** is activated. The fault LED **745** is blue when the brushroll **701** operating normally, and red if the brushroll has been turned on but is jammed or otherwise not operating properly. A current sensing circuit that measures the current increase when the brushroll motor **752** stops or slows is preferred for operating the fault LED **745**. This circuit may also include a circuit breaker and a reset button to reset the brushroll motor **752** after it has been stopped. However, a rotation detecting device, or other devices may be used to determine when the brushroll **701** is operating under a fault condition and appropriately illuminate the fault LED **745**. Other fault indicators may also be useful, for the lower display board **608**, such as an LED that illuminates whenever the brushroll unexpectedly stops.

The brushroll **701** may comprise any type or combination of agitating members, such as a series of tufted bristles, rubber flaps, rigid protrusions, and the like, which are disposed around the periphery of a rotating member. The main body of the brushroll may comprise a cylindrical or helical member formed of plastic, wood, metal, or other materials, that is suspended on bushings or bearings that allow rotation thereof. The term "brushroll," as used herein, is not limited to requiring bristles or brushes on the roller body or having a cylindrical body, but rather is intended to encompass any device, or combination of devices or materials that contribute to the agitation of a surface to be cleaned with the intent to aid in dislodging matter from the surface.

As shown in FIGS. **7** and **12**, a preferred brushroll **701** comprises a spindle **746** to which two rows of bristles **747** are attached in a helical pattern. The brushroll **701** is driven by a drive belt **748**, which may have a flat, grooved, trapezoidal or other profile, and may be toothed to provide greater drive force. The motor and brushroll pulleys are typically contoured according to the type of belt being used. In a preferred embodiment a toothed brushroll pulley **749** is attached at an intermediate location along the spindle **746**, either by being screwed in place, by a friction fit, by a key to prevent rotation, by molding it in place, or by other means. The brushroll pulley **749** may alternatively be located at the end of the spindle **746**. The brushroll pulley **749** may be a separate part that is installed on the spindle **746**, or may be formed integrally therewith. Drive gears and other arrangements may also be used in other embodiments. The ends of the spindle **746** are suspended by bearings (not visible) or bushings, which are located in first and second bearing caps **750**, **751**. Except as otherwise discussed herein, the bearing caps **750**, **751** may comprise any conventional design. Examples of suitable designs are shown in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,373,603, 5,435,038, and 6,591,440, which are incorporated herein by reference.

The brushroll **701** may be powered by any type of motor, such as an air turbine, an electric motor that drives the vacuum fan (e.g., fan/motor **1603**) or a water pump (as in wet extractors), or, most preferably, a separate brushroll motor **752**. A clutch or other mechanism may also be provided to disengage the brushroll **701** or disable the brushroll motor **752** when the brushroll jams, stops, or clogs or to shut off the brushroll when its operation is not required.

The brushroll **701** is mounted in the brushroll chamber **502** by inserting the first bearing cap **750** into an opening **753** formed by and between the base frame **600** and a sole plate **754**. This opening **753** is best shown in FIGS. **5** and **7**. The second bearing cap **750** fits into a similar opening on the other side of the brushroll chamber **502**. When installed, the brushroll **701** is rotatably mounted in the brushroll chamber **502** above the inlet nozzle opening **501**, with the bristles **747** extending through the nozzle opening **501** so that they can contact the surface being cleaned, as best shown in FIG. **10**.

The sole plate **754** comprises a plastic or metal part that is removably attached to the bottom of the base frame **600**. In a preferred embodiment, this attachment is by tabs **755** in the front, and screws (not shown) at the back. A seal **756** (FIG. **10**) is preferably provided to prevent vacuum leakage through the juncture between the sole plate **754** and the base frame **600**. The inlet nozzle opening **501** is formed through the sole plate **754**, and a number of ribs **757** partition the inlet nozzle opening **501** into smaller openings to prevent large objects

from being ingested and strengthen the sole plate **754**. The sole plate **754** also includes a pair of raised walls **758** that closely follow the circumference of the brushroll **701** on either side of the brushroll pulley **749** to help prevent dirt and debris from contaminating the brushroll drive system. A pair of matching walls **503** (FIG. **5**) are provided in the brushroll chamber **502** around the brushroll **701**, and felt seals (not shown) are provided in both sets of walls **758**, **503** to abut the brushroll and complete the seal. This and other brushroll pulley sealing arrangements are known in the art, and any such arrangement may be used with the present invention. The sole plate **754** may also include edge cleaning bristles **759** to help agitate and clean the edges of the vacuum cleaning path, and may have one or more wipers (not shown) that extend downwards to help capture debris.

The present invention provides an improved brushroll motor assembly **707** and brushroll mounting system that is believed to prevent or minimize problems with belt failure, and allow the motor to be soft-mounted to the vacuum cleaner to reduce undesirable vibration, noise and fatigue. As best shown in FIGS. **11-13**, the brushroll motor assembly **707** generally comprises a brushroll motor **752**, upper and lower motor mounting grommets **760**, **761**, and an alignment bracket **762**. The brushroll motor **752** drives a motor pulley **763**, which is pressed onto or otherwise attached to the motor's output shaft. The drive pulley **763** may be provided with teeth that match those of the brushroll pulley **749**, and the motor pulley **763** and brushroll pulley **749** are attached to one another by the drive belt **748**.

A common problem with known brushroll motor assemblies is that the drive belts often wear, slip, break or jump off the pulleys, which necessitates periodic maintenance or repair by the consumer or a repair facility. It is believed these problems are caused, at least in part, by the inability of current brushroll and motor mounting designs to maintain the desired center distance and alignment between the motor pulley **763** and the brushroll pulley **749**. As used herein, the center distance refers to the distance between the rotating axes of the pulleys **763**, **749**. It has been found that maintaining a constant center distance is important because the center distance dictates the amount of tension that the drive belt **748** experiences when it is initially placed over the pulleys **763**, **749**, and when it is driven by the brushroll motor. If the center distance increases, so does the belt tension, and when the distance decreases, the tension decreases (assuming the belt length remains constant). Lower tensions may allow slipping and greater lashing loads when the motor **752** is initially started, particularly if the tension at rest is at or near zero. The alignment between the rotating axes of the motor and brushroll (whether it is parallel, perpendicular or whatever arrangement is appropriate for the particular drive system) is also important because misalignment can cause damage even if the center distance remains constant.

There are various causes of motor/brushroll center distance and alignment variation. For example, the housing parts, such as base frame **600**, into which the brushroll **701** and motor **752** are mounted are often subject to substantial manufacturing variances, particularly when the parts are plastic, and these manufacturing variances can cause the brushroll and motor pulleys **749**, **763** to be out of alignment or at an improper distance from one another. This is particularly true when the brushroll **701** and motor **752** are mounted in different housing parts, in which case the manufacturing tolerances can stack and be even greater. If the housing variance is greater than the operational tolerances of the belt, then the belt may experience excessive or insufficient tension, resulting in stretching, breaking, slipping or belt jumping. Such variances can also cause the pulleys **763**, **749** to be out of alignment, which can cause excessive heat generation that leads to premature wear or loss in belt tension caused by overheating or stretching. The motor/brushroll center distance and alignment are also affected by a phenomenon known as "cold flow," which is a gradual deformation that occurs when a force is applied to the plastic housing. Cold flow is often caused by the drive belt **748**, which is mounted in tension over the pulleys **763**, **749**. This tension applies a force that draws the motor pulley **763** and brushroll pulley **749** together, causing the housing to deform and reducing the motor/brushroll center distance. Such deformation may occur, for example, at the openings **753** that hold the brushroll bearing caps **750**, **751**, where the brushroll motor **752** mounts to the base frame **600**, or elsewhere. Still another factor that contributes to improper center distance and misalignment is the operating tension of the drive belt, which is greater than the static tension. The operating tension can cause the mounting system to flex during operation (as well as encouraging cold flow), thereby pulling the brushroll **701** and motor **752** out of alignment and changing the center distance during use. Similar alignment issues may be caused in a gear-operated embodiment by gear tooth thrust forces that tend to push gears apart and/or perpendicular to the gear face (as in the case of helical gears).

Another problem with known brushroll designs is that the brushroll motor often transmits vibration to the cleaner in which it is mounted, resulting in additional noise and component fatigue. Problems with vacuum noise are believed to be caused, in part, by the manner in which brushroll motors are mounted to cleaners. In a typical prior art device, the brushroll motor is rigidly captured within the vacuum housing by plastic supports. In other cases, the motor may be mounted to one of the housing portions by straps, clips, screws, or other holding devices, rather than being captured between the housing portions. Such typical motor mountings transmit vibration directly to the housing, increasing the overall amplitude of the noise emanating from the device. While it would be possible to soft-mount the motor to the housing (e.g., mount the motor by way of flexible bushings that damp vibrations and reduce noise), doing so is often problematic because it allows the motor to move relative to the housing and, more importantly, relative to the brushroll. This would exacerbate the problems already caused by misalignment and motor/brushroll center distance variations.

The present invention addresses these problems by providing a rigid connection that solidly positions the brushroll **701** and brushroll motor **752** relative to one another, to maintain the desired center distance and alignment between the motor pulley **763** and the brushroll pulley **749**. In doing so, the present invention also allows the motor **752** to be soft-mounted to the base frame **600**, which leads to the additional benefit of reduced noise and fatigue. It is anticipated that the present invention will reduce drive belt problems and increase belt life expectancy, possibly to the point that the belt will never need to be replaced (a so-called "lifetime" belt). Further benefits include quieter operation provided by a soft-mounted brushroll motor **752**.

As shown in FIGS. **7** and **11**, the brushroll motor assembly **707** includes an alignment bracket **762**. The bracket **762** comprises a housing mounting portion **764**, a brushroll mounting portion **765**, and a motor mounting portion **766**. The motor mounting portion **766** has one or more openings **767** through which screws (not shown) or other fasteners are passed to rigidly mount the bracket **762** to the brushroll motor **752**. Alternatively, the bracket **762** can be welded to the brushroll motor housing, or formed integrally therewith.

Similarly, the housing mounting portion **764** has one or more openings **768** through which fasteners, such as screws **769** (FIG. **13**), pass to mount the bracket **762** to the base frame **600**. The brushroll mounting portion **765** also has an opening **770** into which a corresponding protrusion **771** on the second bearing cap **751** fits. The protrusion **771** is prevented from exiting the opening **770** by contact with the upper surface of the sole plate **754**.

The alignment bracket **762** rigidly holds the end of the brushroll **701** and the brushroll motor **752** together, as shown in FIG. **12**, so that their centerline distances and alignment do not vary from the desired value by any appreciable amount, either as a result of manufacturing tolerance variations, cold flow (which, when it occurs in metal, is also known as "creep"), or other factors. In one embodiment, the bracket **762** may be made of a plastic or composite material having high manufacturing tolerance quality (i.e., little variation from one part to the next) and that is shaped and sized to resist the forces that cause cold flow or is selected from a material that resists cold flow, such as a plastic containing rigidity-enhancing agents such as glass fiber, talc and the like. It is preferred, however, to manufacture the bracket **762** from a metal material that can be manufactured to a relatively high tolerance quality, resists creep, and is strong enough to be configured with a minimal size to take up as little space as possible. Steel, magnesium, aluminum, zinc, and alloys thereof, are examples of suitable materials.

The bracket **762** may be made by any suitable manufacturing process, such as: casting with the necessary openings in place, casting then drilling or otherwise machining the openings, stamping a sheet with the necessary shape and with the holes in place then folding the sheet to form the desired shape, stamping and folding a sheet of metal then machining the openings, and so on. Powdered metal casting, sintering and metal injection molding are also expected to be useful for inexpensively producing a fully-formed, highly-accurate and robust final bracket part without the added expense or necessity of additional machining. It is also anticipated that it may be convenient or otherwise desirable to manufacture the alignment bracket **762** out of numerous parts, such as separate brushroll or motor mounting portions that are fitted together, or to form the bracket with additional parts. It is further anticipated that the alignment bracket **762** may be indirectly mounted to the brushroll, motor, or housing, such as by being mounted indirectly by way of a spacer or adapter plate fitted between the alignment bracket **762** and the brushroll motor **752**, brushroll **701** or base frame **600**. All such variations are included within the scope of the present invention.

As shown in FIGS. **11** and **12**, the alignment bracket **762** forms an arch-like structure having a space located between the brushroll mounting portion **765** and the motor mounting portion **766**. The drive belt **748**, motor pulley **763** and brushroll pulley **749** are positioned in this space. The protrusion **771** on the second end cap **751** is fitted into the opening **770** in the brushroll mounting portion **765** of the alignment bracket **762**, thereby preventing or greatly limiting and relative translational movement between the rotating axes of the brushroll motor **752** and the brushroll **701**.

While the opening **770** is shown as being a slot that is open on one side, it may alternatively comprise an hole that completely surrounds the protrusion **771**. In addition, while the use of the interlocking opening **770** and protrusion **771** arrangement shown in the Figures is preferred, the bearing cap **751** may alternatively (or additionally) be rigidly attached to the alignment bracket **762** by fasteners, such as a clips or screws. While such attachments are within the scope of the invention, they are less preferred because they might cause some inconvenience when attempting to remove the brushroll **701**.

While this embodiment of the alignment bracket **762** is shaped in an arch-like manner, it is also within the scope of the invention to make the alignment bracket **762** with other shapes, such as a flat shape, in which the drive belt **748**, motor pulley **763** and brushroll pulley **749** are located outside the bracket **762**. Such variations may require modification to the brushroll motor, pulleys, brushroll and/or the brushroll mounting system, but such modifications will be within the ability of those of ordinary skill in the art in light of the teachings provided herein.

As shown in FIGS. **6** and **8**, the brushroll motor **752** preferably is covered by a portion of the motor cover assembly **722**, along with the height adjusting motor **718**. A seal (not shown) may optionally be located between the motor cover assembly **722** and the base frame **600**, as well as around the brushroll motor **752**, to prevent air from passing through these junctures. Of course a separate cover may be used for each of the motors. As with the height adjusting motor **718**, the motor cover assembly **722** contains the air that passes through and over the brushroll motor **752** so that it can be conveyed to the vacuum source and passed through filters to remove any pollutants that may emanate from the motor, such as motor brush dust particles. While the motor cover assembly **722** encases the motor, it preferably does not rigidly hold it in place. Contact between the brushroll motor **752** and the base frame **600** and motor cover **722** is preferably by way of elastic or foam mounting grommets **760**, **761** that prevent the transmission of vibrations from the brushroll motor **752** to the base frame **600**.

As shown in FIG. **13**, the alignment bracket **762** is mounted to the base frame **600** by a number of screws **769**, or other fasteners. Preferably, three screws **769** are arranged in a triangular pattern to provide a stable, three-point mount. The alignment bracket **762** is optionally isolated from hard contact with the screws **769** and the base frame **600** by one or more elastic mounting grommets **1201**. Washers **1202** may be provided to prevent the screws **769** from pulling through or damaging the grommets **1201**. The grommets **1201** preferably extend through the bracket holes **768** to isolate the shanks of the screws **769** from the alignment bracket **762**. In this way, the alignment bracket **762** can be prevented from contacting the base frame **600** except by way of the grommets **1201**. If contact does occur at other locations, it is preferably made through a rubber, foam, or other vibration-insulating material. The grommets **1201** may be rubber or any other vibration-reducing material. In an alternative embodiment, the grommets **1201** are omitted, and the motor **752**, brushroll **701** and/or alignment bracket **762** may be rigidly attached to the base frame **600**.

While the brushroll mounting system of the present invention is shown herein in an upright vacuum cleaner, it will be appreciated that it may be used with any type of motorized agitator that is subject to misalignment with its driving motor, including gear-driven brushrolls and belt- or gear-driven vertical-axis rotating brushes that are powered by electric motors, turbine motors, or similar drive motors. The brushroll mounting system may also be used in other applications, such as in powerheads for canister vacuums, in stick vacuums, and so on. Other variations will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in light of the disclosures provided herein.

Turning now to FIGS. **14-33**, the rear housing **102** and its various components are described in more detail. The rear housing **102** generally comprises a rear frame **1401** and a

handle assembly **1402**. The rear frame **1401** serves as the connection point for the base **101**, and generally acts as the backbone of the rear housing **102**, by holding the various other parts. The handle assembly **1402** extends upwards from the rear frame **1401** and terminates at a grip **1403**.

Referring in particular to FIG. **16**, the rear frame **1401** includes a vacuum bag chamber **1604**, and a motor chamber **1605** located below the bag chamber **1604**. This arrangement helps keep the center of gravity of the device low by placing the relatively heavy components as low as possible, and improves maneuverability and reduces the likelihood of tipping. A cordreel chamber **1606** is located on one side of the motor chamber **1605**, and a hose slot **1601** for receiving the base hose **301** is located on the other side of the motor chamber **1605**. A pair of base mounting bosses **1602** are provided on the exterior of the rear frame **1401**.

The rear frame **1401** includes an upper display board **1607**, which includes a number of LEDs **1608** and circuitry that illuminates the LEDs **1608** to provide information regarding the operating status of the vacuum cleaner **100**. Examples of uses for the LEDs **1608** are to indicate when the vacuum bag or various filters require servicing, to indicate an interruption in the operation of the vacuum brushroll, to indicate that the device is plugged in, to indicate that the device is on, to indicate which cleaning mode the device is in (floor cleaning or accessory cleaning), and so on. Such circuitry is known in the art, and the LEDs **1608** may be conventional or as described elsewhere herein. The upper display board **1607** is installed such that the LEDs **1608** are visible through holes **1609** at the top of the rear frame **1401**. An upper display lens **1648**, of conventional design or as described elsewhere herein, may also be provided to cover the LEDs **1608** and provide a graphical or textual indicator of the purpose of each LED **1608**.

In a preferred embodiment, the center LED **1608** is a blue LED that is illuminated when the vacuum cleaner systems are operating optimally. The side LEDs **1608** are red LEDs and are normally off. One side LED **1608** is illuminated to indicate that a filter change is necessary, and the other side LED **1608** is illuminated to indicate that a bag change is necessary. If either of the red lights come on, the center LED turns off. The side LEDs **1608** are controlled by pressure switches, which measure the pressure differential across the filter bag (not shown) and the post-motor filter **1632** (FIG. **16**). When the differential drops below a predetermined value (indicating a significant blockage of the airflow), the appropriate LED **1608** is illuminated. Such pressure differential circuits are known in the art.

A cordreel **1610**, which is described in greater detail elsewhere herein, is preferably oriented with its axis of rotation generally perpendicular to the fore-aft direction of the vacuum cleaner **100**, and installed in the rear frame **1401** by sliding it backwards into the cordreel chamber **1606**. When so installed, the extension cord plug (not shown) extends through a cord opening **1502** (FIGS. **15** and **22**) on the back surface of the rear frame **1401**. A cordreel pedal **1503** is pivotally attached on the back surface of the rear frame **1401** for releasing the cordreel, and is covered and held in place by a cordreel pedal housing **1504**. A vacuum hose **1611** is attached between the cordreel **1610** and the vacuum bag chamber **1604**, to help cool the cordreel **1610**. The operation and features of the cordreel **1610** are described in greater detail elsewhere herein with reference to FIGS. **30-33**.

A fan and motor assembly **1603** (fan/motor) is installed in the motor chamber **1605**. The fan/motor **1603** may comprise any suitable motor and fan combination, as are known in the art, but is preferably provided with the motor and fan integrated as a single part. It is also preferred that the fan/motor **1603** be a self-cooled device, in which air exiting the impeller passes over the motor to cool it. Of course, the motor may also or alternatively be provided with a separate cooling fan.

The fan/motor **1603** is mounted with its axis of rotation aligned with the fore-aft direction of the housing (as it is when in the upright storage position). The fan/motor **1603** is encased in a shroud **1612**, and sealed by a motor shroud gasket **1613**. The shroud **1612** comprises a plastic housing having a shroud outlet **1614**, and a mounting block **1615** comprising a pliable, vibration absorbing material, such as rubber. The mounting block **1615** extends through the shroud **1612** and directly contacts the end of the fan/motor **1603** to hold it in place within the shroud **1612**. The shroud gasket **1613** also comprises rubber or another pliable, vibration absorbing substance, and has a motor inlet hole **1616** that surrounds the inlet to the fan/motor impeller. As such, when the fan/motor **1603** is assembled within the shroud **1612** and gasket **1613**, the mounting block **1615** and gasket **1613** provide two vibration-reducing surfaces by which to mount the fan/motor **1603**.

The fan/motor **1603** is mounted in the motor chamber **1605** between a motor cover **1617** and a motor inlet conduit **1618**. A thermal cutoff device **1619** is preferably located in the motor chamber **1605** to protect the device and user from harm if the motor experiences a fault condition. A suitable thermal cutoff device is disclosed, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 6,484,352, which is incorporated herein by reference.

The motor inlet conduit **1618** is mounted in the rear frame **1401** behind the fan/motor **1603**, and fluidly connects the bag chamber outlet to the inlet of the fan/motor **1603**. A gasket **1620** is provided at the upper end of the motor inlet conduit **1618** to seal it against the bag chamber **1604**. The motor inlet conduit **1618** is preferably formed by two shell halves **1621**, **1622** that are ultrasonically welded together to form a conduit, but other constructions may be used. In a preferred embodiment, the inlet conduit **1618** has a generally continuous cross-sectional profile, or a smoothly changing profile, but also includes one or more expanded regions, such as first and second expanded regions **1623** and **1624**. These expanded regions are each filled with a respective foam block **1625**, **1626** or other sound deadening material. The foam blocks **1625**, **1626** may extend into the conduit **1618**, but preferably are sized such that their inner surfaces blend into the cross-sectional profile of the inlet conduit **1618** at the locations immediately before and after each of the expanded regions **1623**, **1624**. In this way, when the foam blocks **1625**, **1626** are installed, the inlet conduit **1618** has a continuous, or smoothly changing cross-sectional profile along its entire length. The use of the expanded regions **1623**, **1624** and foam inserts **1625**, **1626** is expected to reduce the overall noise level of the vacuum cleaner **100**.

The motor cover **1617** is installed on the front face of the rear frame **1401** to capture the fan/motor **1603** and cordreel **1610** in place. To this end, the motor cover **1617** includes a detent **1627** into which the shroud mounting block **1615** fits. In addition to covering the motor chamber **1605**, the motor cover **1617** preferably also covers and encloses the cordreel chamber **1606**, and the hose slot **1601**. An opening **1628** is provided on the motor cover **1617** over the portion that covers the hose slot **1601** to receive the base hose **301**. The motor cover **1617** and/or rear frame **1401** may also be provided with one or more seals to seal the motor chamber **1605** and/or cordreel chamber **1606**. The motor cover preferably comprises a first outer housing **1629**, which is attached directly to the motor cover **1617**, and a second outer housing **1630**, which is attached to either the first outer housing **1630** or the

motor cover **1617**. These outer housings have been found to be useful to provide a multi-colored housing without resorting to complex molding and/or painting techniques. Of course, the motor cover outer housings may be omitted by forming the motor cover **1617** as a unitary part.

The motor cover **1617** forms an air flow passage to convey the air passing through the fan/motor **1603** to the atmosphere, and may simply comprise vents that directly exit the vacuum cleaner **100**. However, it is often desirable for vacuum cleaners to have additional filtration to further clean the air exiting the fan/motor **1603**. Therefore the motor cover **1617** (or rear frame **1401**) may also include a post-motor filter mount **1631**. The filter mount **1631** is in fluid communication with the motor chamber **1605**, and is adapted to receive a post-motor filter **1632** that further cleans the air exiting the vacuum cleaner **100**. In order to reduce noise generated by the vacuum cleaner **100**, the shroud outlet **1614** is oriented downwardly, and the motor chamber **1605** is lined with a foam or other sound-deadening material, as known in the art. In this way, the air exiting the fan/motor **1603** passes along a circuitous route and a relatively long distance before exiting the vacuum cleaner **100**, which is expected to achieve noise reduction over a more direct airflow path.

The post-motor filter **1632** may comprise any type of filter, such as pleated or foam filters, or combinations of filter types, and preferably is HEPA rated. A filter clamp **1633** may also be provided to hold the post-motor filter **1632** in place. The filter clamp **1633** preferably comprises a removable door-like structure that snaps onto the motor cover **1617** on one side by a flexible tab, and on the other side by rigid tabs, as known in the art. A preferred filter clamp **1633** has one or more openings **1634** located at its upper end to direct air leaving the filter upwards into an exhaust chamber **1701**, which is described in more detail with reference to FIGS. **17-19**. The post-motor filter **1632** and filter cover **1633** are shown installed in FIG. **20**.

The vacuum bag chamber **1604** is formed in the forward face of the rear frame **1401** and shaped and sized to receive a vacuum bag (not shown). A bag inlet pipe **1635** extends into the bag chamber **1604** and is shaped and sized such that the vacuum bag can be installed over it to receive the incoming flow of dirt-laden air. An outlet grill **1636** is positioned at the lower portion of the bag chamber **1604** to cover an outlet (not visible) that leads to the fan/motor **1603** by way of inlet conduit **1618**. A flat, pleated or other type of filter (not shown) may be installed to cover the bag chamber outlet to collect dust that is not filtered by the vacuum bag before the airstream enters the vacuum motor **1603**. Such filters are typically referred to as pre-motor filters. A series of ribs **1637** may be provided along the vertical walls of the bag chamber **1604** to prevent the vacuum bag from pressing directly against the walls and limiting the airflow through the bag.

A bag cover **1638**, which is shown in more detail in FIGS. **17-19**, is removably attached to the rear frame **1401** to seal the front of the bag chamber **1604**. While any attachment method may be used, the bag cover **1638** of this embodiment preferably is held in place at its bottom end by two downwardly-protruding tabs **1639** that fit into corresponding holes **1640** on the first outer motor housing **1629**, although attachment to any other rigid part would be suitable as well. The top of the bag cover **1638** is held in place by rearwardly-projecting flexible tabs **1641** that releasably snap into corresponding holes **1642** in the rear frame **1401**. The bag cover **1638** may also include a handle **1643** to facilitate removal and handling. The bag cover **1638** conveniently covers both the bag chamber **1604**, and the post-motor filter **1632**, which allows the bag and filter **1632** to be removed simultaneously, and ensures that the user is aware of the location of the filter **1632**.

As shown in FIG. **18**, the rear surface of the bag cover **1638** is shaped to form the front half of the bag chamber **1702**, and may also have ribs **1703** to prevent the bag from pressing against the walls and limiting the airflow through the bag. The rear frame **1401** and bag cover **1638** have mating sealing surfaces **1704**, **1644** to tightly seal the bag chamber **1604**. Labyrinth seals, gaskets or other sealing devices may be used to provide this seal, as known in the art.

The bag cover **1638** preferably also includes an exhaust chamber **1701** that is positioned to receive and diffuse air exiting the post-motor filter **1632**. The exhaust chamber **1701** generally comprises a channel between an opening **1705** through the bag cover wall, and a grate **1706**, which is attached to the outer surface of the bag cover **1638**. The opening **1705** is positioned adjacent the filter clamp openings **1634** when the bag cover **1638** is installed to thereby receive cleaned air exiting the fan/motor **1603**. The grate **1706** preferably comprises a plastic panel having a plurality of circular holes passing therethrough, but other constructions are possible. The grate **1706** may be provided as a separate part of the bag cover **1638** that is attached by screws (not shown) or other attachment methods, or may be integrally formed as part of the bag cover **1638**.

A fabric cover **1707** may be attached to the grate **1706**, preferably on the outer surface thereof, by adhesives, wires, stitching, molding in place, or any other suitable means. As shown in FIG. **19**, in a preferred embodiment, the fabric cover **1707** is attached by positioning it over and around the front of the grate **1706** and sewing a perimeter wire **1708** into the perimeter of the portion of the cover **1707** that extends around the back of the grate **1706**. One or more tensioning wires **1709** are then attached to the perimeter wire **1708** to place it under tension, and thus stretch the fabric cover **1707** tight over the front of the grate **1706**. Metal, nylon, or other materials may be used for the wires **1708**, **1709**, and any suitable cloth or nonwoven fabric material may be used as the fabric cover **1707**.

In addition to providing an aesthetically-pleasing outward appearance, the fabric cover **1707** may also help diffuse and quiet the air flowing out of the vacuum cleaner **100**. It is also expected to exhaust the air in a manner that does not generate objectionable strong gusts of air that can irritate the user or spread debris on the surface being cleaned.

The rear frame **1401** may also include a bag-in-place feature that prevents the bag cover **1638** from being installed when there isn't a vacuum bag in the bag chamber **1604**. In one embodiment, the bag-in-place feature comprises a plate **1645** that is installed at the top of the bag chamber **1604**. The plate **1645** includes a slot **1646** that receives a tab on the bag, and a spring-biased lever arm **1647** that is moved by the tab into a position in which it does not interfere with the mating sealing surfaces **1704**, **1644** of the bag chamber **1604** and bag cover **1638**. Such devices are known in the art, and any such device may be used with the present invention.

While the preferred embodiment illustrates a vacuum having a vacuum bag, it will be understood that this can be replaced by one or more cyclone separators, dirt cups or combinations of cyclones, cups and vacuum bags.

Referring now to FIGS. **20** and **21**, the present invention also provides wheel and base mounting arrangements that may be used on upright vacuum cleaners and other types of cleaning devices. FIG. **20** depicts the rear frame **1401** with the motor cover **1617**, first and second outer housings **1629**, **1630**, and filter clamp **1633** installed. The right side wheel

103 (on the left in FIG. 20) and right side base mounting bracket 303 are also shown installed.

As noted before, the rear frame 1401 has a base mounting boss 1602 on each side at its lower end. Each base mounting boss 1602 comprises a generally cylindrical protrusion that extends laterally along an axis perpendicular to the fore-aft direction of the vacuum cleaner 100. The base mounting brackets 302, 303 each have a cylindrical flange 704 that fits over the corresponding base mounting boss 1602. When so assembled, the mounting brackets 302, 303 and bosses 1602 form a pivoting attachment between the base 101 and the rear housing 102. One or more clamps 2001 may be provided to abut the outer sides of the mounting brackets 302, 303 to hold them against the side of the rear frame 1401. Screws 2002 or other suitable devices may be used to hold the clamps 2001 in place, or the clamps 2001 maybe formed as parts of the device housing. In addition, the side of the rear frame 1401 (or other parts of the base mounting arrangement), may be provided with grooves 2003 to reduce the contact surface area, which may reduce friction and/or the likelihood of squeaks being generated during pivoting movement.

The base mounting bosses 1602 and/or the cylindrical flanges 704 may be provided as shown, and may be coated with relatively low-friction and low-wear materials so that they rotate smoothly on one another. These parts may also be self-lubricated or lubricated with dry or liquid lubricants. For example, the bosses 1602 and/or the flanges 704 may be steel, stainless steel, aluminum, acetal (also known as polyacetal, polyoxymethylene, or polyformaldehyde), or other engineering plastics, such as polycarbonate, glass-filled nylon, and so on. Suitable acetal materials include Delrin™, which is available from E.I du Pont de Nemours and Company, and Celcon™, which is available from Ticona, a division of Celanese Corporation. Conventional lubricants such as polytetrafluoroethylene (such as Teflon™), molybdenum disulfide, and so on may be used. One or more rings of friction-reducing and/or self-lubricating material may also be provided as a bushing between the flanges 704 and bosses 1602. Furthermore, one or more roller or ball bearings may be used to form a pivoting joint between these parts. Other variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure.

The base attachment arrangement is also provided with travel stops to prevent the base 101 and rear housing 102 from rotating past a desirable range of movement. To this end, the left and right mounting brackets 302, 303 each have an upward travel stop 2004, which engages a corresponding surface 2005 on the rear housing 102 when the rear housing 102 is in the desired uppermost rotational position. Preferably, the upward travel stops 2004 and corresponding surfaces 2005 are positioned to allow the rear housing 102 to pivot to a generally vertical position in which the vacuum cleaner 100 can be left unattended with relatively little risk of it falling or being knocked over (the upright storage position).

The left mounting bracket 302 also includes a handle lock 2006 and a lower travel stop 2007, which engage a pivot release 2008 mounted on the rear frame 1401 adjacent the left base mounting boss 1602. The pivot release 2008 comprises a rocker arm that is pivotally mounted on a pin 2009 that protrudes from the rear frame 1401. One end of the rocker arm comprises a foot pedal 2010, which is exposed to the operator during use, and the other end of the rocker arm comprises a laterally-extending hook 2011. A leaf spring 2012 is attached to the bottom of the rocker arm to press against the rear frame 1401 and bias the hook downward when the foot pedal 2010 is not depressed. The hook 2011 is shaped such that it can contact the handle lock 2006 or lower travel stop 2007 (depending on the angular position of the base 101) when the foot pedal 2010 is not depressed.

When the rear housing 102 is in the upright storage position, the pivot release hook 2011 engages the handle lock 2006, and holds the rear housing 102 in the this position until the user depresses the foot pedal 2010 and lifts the hook 2011 out of engagement. The user can then pivot the rear housing 102 backwards to operate the device in the floor cleaning mode. Once the operator reaches a desired lower normal operating position for the rear housing 102, the hook 2011 (which is returned to its normal position by the return spring 2012) engages the lower travel stop 2007. At this point, the user can not lower the rear housing 102 any further without lifting the base 101 off of the floor. However, if even further downward pivoting is desired (or if a user desired to fold the base 101 out of the way to access the motor cover 1617 or other parts for service), the user can again depress the pivot release 2008 and move the hook 2011 out of engagement with the lower travel stop 2007 and the base 101 can then pivot even further relative to the rear housing 102.

To facilitate returning the rear housing 102 to the upright position without having to depress the foot pedal 2010, the left mounting bracket 302 also includes ramp surfaces 2013 that engage with the hook 2011 and push it upwards, against the bias of the spring 2012, and over the lower travel stop 2007 and handle lock 2006.

Referring now to FIGS. 20 and 21, in a preferred embodiment, each wheel 103 comprises a floor contacting surface 2014, a sidewall 2015, and a hubcap depression 2016, and a generally cylindrical inner flange 2017. The wheel 103 is pivotally mounted to the rear frame 1401 by its inner flange 2017. While it is possible, in one embodiment, to mount the inner flange 2017 on a cylindrical axle (not shown) that extends from the rear frame 1401, in a more preferred embodiment, the inner flange 2017 is mounted on a set of one or more bearings 2018, which are attached to bearing mounts 2019 located on the rear frame 1401 within the base mounting boss 1602. Four bearings are preferred, but other numbers may be used. The locations of the bearings are preferably selected to distribute the load of the vacuum cleaner 100 among them. In addition, since the weight of the device is always borne by the lowermost bearings 2018 (which will be the bearings located on the bottom in the upright storage position and the tilted-back use position), the relatively unloaded bearings, such as the upper forward bearing in the shown embodiment, may be replaced by simple plastic or metal bushings that are generally only used to hold the wheel 103 in position when the device is lifted off the ground. As such, combinations of bearings, bushings, and simple plastic or metal axles is envisioned with the present invention.

As shown most clearly in FIG. 21, the bearings 2018 are held in place by a wheel hub 2020, which is secured to the bearing mounts 2019 by screws 2021 or other fastening devices. The wheel hub 2020 also includes a radially extending lip 2022 that abuts, or is in close proximity to, the outer surface of the wheel's hubcap depression 2016 to thereby hold the wheel 103 on the rear frame 1401 in the axial direction. One or more low-friction rings may be located between the wheel 103 and the rear frame 1401 and/or wheel hub lip 2022 to provide a low-clearance and low-friction fit. Self-lubricating materials may also be used, as may dry of fluid lubricants, to further reduce friction and wear and the likelihood of the wheels 103 squeaking as they rotate.

The wheel assembly is completed by a hubcap 2023, which is removably secured to the wheel's hubcap depression 2016 to form a smooth outer appearance. The hubcap 2023 is

preferably attached by resilient tabs **2024** that fit into corresponding slots **2025** in the wheel **103**, but other attachments may be used.

Vacuum hoses (not shown) may be provided with one end adjacent each wheel **103** and/or base mounting bracket **302**, **303** and another end in fluid communication with the suction side of the vacuum cleaner (such as in the bag chamber **1604** or motor inlet conduit **1618**) to keep these pivoting joints free of dust and dirt, and collect any particles that are abraded from their sliding surfaces.

Referring now more generally to FIGS. **15** and **22**, the assembly of the back of the rear frame **1401** is shown and described. As shown in FIG. **15**, the rear frame **1401** has various parts attached to its back surface, including the cordreel pedal **1503** and its pedal housing **1504**, which have been described previously, an accessory valve assembly **1501**, and the vacuum's handle assembly **1402**. It may also be desirable to store the vacuum's accessory tool on the vacuum cleaner **100** itself, and so in one embodiment, the back of the rear frame **1401** also includes a storage compartment **104** (FIG. **2**).

The accessory valve **1501** is shown in more detail in FIGS. **24-26**. The accessory valve **1501** generally comprises a switching arrangement **2401** having a floor inlet **2402** an accessory inlet **2403**, and a flexible outlet hose **2404**. The floor inlet **2402** is attached to the base hose **301** (FIGS. **3-6**), and the accessory inlet is attached to the accessory hose **2714** (FIGS. **15**, **27** and **28**). The base hose **301** preferably extends through a hose opening **2201** (FIG. **22**), which passes through the back of the rear frame **1401** to the hose slot **1601**. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. **25**, the floor inlet **2402** is slightly larger than the accessory inlet **1004**, to reduce the suction applied to accessory tools connected to the accessory inlet **1004**, but this construction is not required. The outlet hose **2404**, which maybe opaque or transparent, leads from the switching arrangement **2401** to an outlet **2405**. The outlet **2405** is attached by a friction fit, bayonet fittings, or by other means, to a connector **2406**, which is attached to the rear frame **1401** to be in fluid communication with the bag inlet pipe **1635** (FIG. **16**). The connector **2406** preferably comprises a clear plastic material with gentle internal bends to facilitate detection of clogs. Any clogs can be readily removed by disconnecting either the connector **2406** from the rear frame **1401**, or the outlet **2405** from the connector **2406**. The connector **2406** can be fixed in place by screws or other tool- or hand-operable fastening devices.

The switching arrangement **2401** includes a first switch housing member **2407** and a second switch housing member **2408** that are detachably connected to one another, such as by snap engagement, fasteners, or other means, or may be unattached but held in their respective positions by separate attachment to the rear frame **1401**. The first and second switch housing members **2407**, **2408** are attached to the back of the rear frame **600** by screws (not shown), snap engagement, or other fasteners. It will also be appreciated that either or both of the first and second switch housing members **2407**, **2408** may be formed integrally with one another or with other parts of the vacuum cleaner housing, and it is not strictly required to provide them as separate parts.

As shown in FIG. **22**, a cover plate **2202** is attached to the rear frame **1401** below the switching arrangement **2401**. The cover plate **2202** covers the connections between the hoses and the accessory valve **1501**, and may include internal ribs that hold the hoses **301**, **2714** in place. In this way, the hoses **301**, **2714** can be disconnected from the accessory valve **1501** simply by removing the cover plate **2202**. The cover plate **2202** also preferably covers the hose opening **2201** and completely conceals the base hose **301** from view during normal operation. In this way, the base hose **301** is entirely concealed within the base **101** and rear housing **102** during normal use, which protects the base hose **301** from damage, and provides an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

The first switch housing member **2407** has a generally arcuate inner surface **2501** in which the floor and accessory inlets **2402**, **2403** are formed. Each inlet **2402**, **2403** has a seal **2502** associated with it. The seals **2502** comprise any suitable rubber or synthetic sealing material. While the seals **2502** are shown as separate members, they may be joined to one another, or may be integrally molded (such as by two-shot molding or overmolding) into the first switch housing member **2407**. The seals **2502** may optionally be omitted.

A switch hose connector **2503**, which has a hose connector passage **2504** forming a fluid conduit through it, is pivotally mounted within the first switch housing member **2407**. As can be seen in FIG. **26**, the switch hose connector **2503** is adapted to pivot between a floor cleaning position (shown), in which it connects the floor inlet **2402** with the outlet hose **2404**, and an accessory cleaning position, in which it connects the accessory inlet **2403** with the outlet hose **2404**. Suitable travel stops (not shown) may be provided to prevent any further pivoting beyond these positions. The switch hose connector **2503** may be pivotally mounted in any suitable manner. In a preferred embodiment, the switch hose connector **2503** has a first generally cylindrical protrusion **2505** that fits into a corresponding first hole **2506** in the first switch housing member **2407**, and a second generally cylindrical protrusion **2507** that fits into a corresponding second hole **2508** in the first switch housing member **2407**. The first and second protrusions and holes are sized so that the switch hose connector **2503** can not be inserted in the wrong direction. In the shown embodiment, the switch hose connector **2503** is installed by flexing the first switch housing member **2407** until it is possible to insert the switch hose connector **2503** between the holes **2506**, **2508**, then releasing it to capture the protrusions **2505**, **2507** within the holes **2506**, **2508**. Lubricants, bearings, bushings, self-lubricating materials, or other friction-reducing devices may also be used to help create a smooth pivoting arrangement between these parts.

The switch hose connector **2503** also includes a sealing surface **2509** that is located such that it contacts or nearly contacts the lips **2510** of the seals **2502**, as shown in FIG. **26**. To this end, the sealing surface **2509** is formed as an arced surface that generally follows the contour of the arcuate inner surface **2501** of the first switch housing member **2407**. The switch hose connector passage **2504** passes through the sealing surface **2509** to a hose mounting boss **2512**. The sealing surface **2509** is preferably sized such that it always maintains at least some contact with both seals **2502**, as shown in FIG. **26**, which provides a vacuum seal and helps prevent the sealing surface **2509** from catching on the seal lips **2510**. While it is preferred to position the seals **2502** in or around the two inlets **2402**, **2403**, the seals **2502** may be removed, or replaced by a single seal located on the sealing surface **2509** around the passage **2504**.

The outlet hose **2404** is connected to the switch hose connector **2503** by screws **2511** that thread into the hose mounting boss **2512**, but any other permanent or detachable attachment method may be used. In the shown embodiment, the outlet hose **2404** includes a flange **2513** that abuts the hose mounting boss **2512**. The flange **2513** and/or mounting boss **2512** may include gaskets, labyrinth seals, or other sealing devices to reduce the likelihood of a vacuum leak at their juncture.

As noted before, the second switch housing member **2408** is attached to the first switch housing member **2407**. The second switch housing member **2408** covers the switch hose connector **2503**, and generally comprises a disk-like front face **2514** and a shroud portion **2515** that extends from the face **2514** to cover the moving parts of the switching arrangement **2401**. The shroud portion **2515** has a first cutout **2516** into which the first switch housing member **2407** fits, and a second cutout **2517** through which the flexible outlet hose **2404** passes.

A switch handle **2518** is mounted to the switch hose connector **2503** through a hole **2519** in the face **2514** of the second switch housing member **2408**, and secured with a screw **2520** or other fastener. The switch handle **2518** includes projections **2521** that fit within corresponding slots **2522** in the first protrusion **2505** to rotationally lock the handle **2518** to the switch hose connector **2503**. The switch handle **2518** also includes one or more ribs having notches **2523** located thereon. These notches **2523** pass through an arcuate slot **2524** in the second switch housing member face **2514** and engage corresponding projections (not visible) located on cantilevered portions **2525**, **2526** of the first switch housing member **2407**. The notches **2523** engage the first cantilevered projection **2525** when the switch hose connector **2503** is turned with the hose connector passage **2504** fluidly connecting the floor inlet **2402** with the outlet hose **2404** (the floor cleaning position), and the notches **2523** engage the second cantilevered projection **2526** when the switch hose connector **2503** is turned with the hose connector passage **2504** connecting the accessory inlet **2402** with the outlet hose **2404** (the accessory cleaning position). In each of these positions, the engagement between the notches **2523** and the cantilevered projections **2525**, **2526** resiliently holds the switch handle **2518** in place. This provides a tactile indicator when the switch hose connector **2503** is in each of its two operating positions, and prevents it from inadvertently rotating out of position.

While the foregoing switching arrangement is preferred, numerous variations of this aspect of the invention may also be practiced and are within the scope of the present invention. For example, in one alternative embodiment, the switch hose connector is a sliding member, rather than a pivoting member. In this embodiment, the first switch housing member is provided with a flat surface that holds the floor and accessory inlets, and the handle is replaced by a lever or slider. Other variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art based on the teachings herein.

The present invention also includes an accessory tool storage compartment **104** (FIG. **2**), which is formed on the back of the rear frame **1401**. The storage compartment **104** is adapted to hold, and preferably conceal, one or more accessory tools, such as carpet brushes, crevice tools, lint brushes, and so on, as are known in the art. As shown in FIG. **22**, the storage compartment **104** comprises an inner panel **2203** and a compartment cover **2204**, which are attached to the back side of the rear frame **1401**. The inner panel **2203** (which, if desired, may be integrally formed with the rear frame **1401**, rather than being supplied as a separate part) includes a first tool mounting indentation **2205**, having a first set of tool mounting clips **2206**. A second tool mounting indentation **2207** is formed on the back surface of the rear frame **1401**, and includes a second set of tool mounting clips **2208**. The indentations **2205**, **2207** preferably are shaped to approximate the shape of the tools that belongs in them, which assists the user with storing the parts in the proper place. The clips **2206**, **2208** comprise flexible protrusions into which the tools fit by firm but releasable snap engagement.

The compartment cover **2204** fits over the portion of the rear frame **1401** having the tool mounts **2205**, **2207**, to provide the device with a neater and more aesthetically pleasing appearance. The compartment cover **2204** also conceals the accessory switch outlet hose **2404**. The compartment cover **2204** is attached to the rear frame **1401** by downwardly-extending lower tabs **2209** that protrude from the bottom of the compartment cover **2204**, and a flexible snap tab **2210** that is located just inside a cover opening **2211**. The lower tabs **2209** slidably engage a pair of slots **2212** on the cover plate **2202** (or on the rear frame **1401** itself), and the snap tab **2210** fits into a slot **2213** on the inner panel **2203** (or rear frame **1401**). The snap tab **2210** comprises a flexible arm having one or more hooks that engage corresponding surfaces in the slot **2213** to releasably hold the compartment cover **2204** in place. Such snap tabs are known in the art. Of course, other attachment methods may be used, such as screws or other fasteners.

A cover door **2214** is attached to the compartment cover **2204** to selectively close the opening **2211**. In a preferred embodiment, the cover door **2214** is pivotally attached to the compartment cover **2204** on a vertical pivot axis that extends between a fixed upper pivot **2215**, and a slideable lower pivot **2216**, which fit in respective holes in the compartment cover **2204**. A coil spring **2217** is provided to act in torsion to automatically bias the door **2214** into the closed position.

As shown in more detail in FIG. **23**, the lower pivot **2216** comprises a pin having a relatively thin lower end **2218**, and a thicker upper end **2219**. The lower pivot **2216** is assembled by inserting the spring **2217** into a first hole **2220** in the door **2214**, followed by the lower pivot **2216**. Once this is done, the upper door pivot **2215** is inserted into a hole (not shown) at the top of the cover opening **2211**, and the lower pivot **2216** is guided over a lower hole **2221** and released. Once released, the spring **2217** pushes the lower pivot **2216** into the lower hole **2221**. The lower hole **2221** includes a protrusion **2222** that fits into a notch **2223** on the bottom of the lower pivot **2216**, to thereby prevent the lower pivot from rotating relative to the compartment cover **2204**. Similarly, the first hole **2220** and the top of the lower pivot **2216** each include notches **2224** and **2225** into which the ends of the spring **2217** fit, so that the ends of the spring can not rotate relative to these parts. As such, when the cover door **2214** is opened, which causes the notch **2224** to rotate, the spring **2217** is placed under a torsional load because its lower end is locked in the lower pivot **2216** and can not rotate. This generates a restoring force that biases the spring **2217** back to its relaxed position, and the door **2214** into the closed position.

A door latching arrangement is also provided to hold the cover door **2214** in the closed position. The latching arrangement comprises a barbed post **2703** (FIG. **27**) that fits into a snap **2226** that opens and closes on alternate pushes, as are known in the art. Of course, any other pivoting and latching arrangements can be used for the cover door **2214**, as will be understood by those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure.

Referring now to FIGS. **27** and **28**, the handle assembly **1402** of the present invention is shown and described in more detail. The handle assembly **1402** generally comprises an arched handle frame **2704** to which an upper grip post **2702** is attached.

In a preferred embodiment, the grip post **2702** includes one or more vacuum controls that can be used to operate and adjust the vacuum cleaner **100**. Although any types of controls may be used, it is preferred for the controls to comprise an on/off switch **2705**, and a height adjustment control **2701**. The power switch **2705** may be a conventional switch that turns on the fan/motor **1603** and the brushroll motor **752**, and

preferably has a first position in which only the fan/motor **1603** is activated, and a second position in which both the fan/motor **1603** and brushroll motor **752** are activated. The power switch **2705** may also be connected to circuitry that disables the fan/motor **1603** and/or brushroll motor **752** during fault conditions, such as the thermal cutoff device **1619** described above. Additional circuitry may be used to disable the brushroll motor **752** when the accessory cleaning mode is activated. For example, the accessory valve **1501** may have an electric cutoff switch that disables the brushroll motor **752** when it is placed in the accessory cleaning position, or the rear housing **102** may have such a switch that is activated when it is placed in the upright position.

The height adjustment control **2701** preferably comprises a rocker switch that is electrically attached to a motorized height adjustment assembly **705**, as described above with reference to FIGS. **7** and **10**, and can be moved in one direction to raise the base, and in another direction to lower the base.

The grip post **2702** includes a grip **1403**, which may be integrally formed with the grip post **2702**, or formed as one or more separate parts, as shown. In the shown embodiment, the grip **1403** is provided as a separate molding and attached to the back of the grip post **2702**. A cap **2706** may also be provided to improve the cosmetic appearance of the device. This construction facilitates concealment of the wires leading to the controls **2705**, **2701** within the grip post **2702**. The grip **1403** may be provided with a textured and/or tactile grip overmolding **2707** to improve the user's grip and accentuate the aesthetic feel of the device.

As shown in FIGS. **1**, **28** and **29**, the back of the grip post **2702** also includes a cord retainer clip **2801**, which is shown in more detail in FIG. **29**. The cord retainer clip **2801** is provided to hold the power cord **2901** adjacent the grip **1403**, which is sometimes desirable to prevent the cord from becoming entangled with the vacuum's base **101** during operation. The retainer clip **2801** may be of any conventional construction, but preferably comprises a T-shaped protrusion having a base **2902**, a grip arm **2903** that is shaped to firmly receive a power cord, and a release arm **2904** that extends opposite the grip arm **2903**. The release arm **2904** serves as a lever that can be pressed towards the grip post **2702** to move the grip arm **2903** away from the grip post **2702**. This useful feature allows the user to use lever action to insert and release the power cord **2901** from the grip arm **2903**. Not only does this make this process easier than with many known designs, but it also allows the grip arm **2903** to be provided with a smaller diameter to more aggressively grip the power cord **2901**. The release arm **2904** is preferably provided with an enlarged surface, as shown, to facilitate its operation, and ensure that it is not uncomfortable to press it towards the grip post **2702**.

The grip post **2702** and grip **1403** may be attached directly to the top of the rear frame **1401**, as known in the art, but it is preferred for these parts to be attached to a handle frame **2704** that comprises two legs **2706** that generally form an arch. The legs **2706** fit over and around the rear frame **1401**, and are attached at various points **2707** by fasteners, such as snaps, screws (not shown), and so on. Each leg includes a hollow interior space **2708**, which is adapted to hold one or more accessory tools. For example, in the shown embodiment, one leg **2706** is adapted to receive a crevice cleaning tool **2709** on a stub post **2710** at its lower end, and by snap engagement with the inner surface of the interior space **2708** at its upper end. The other leg **2706** receives an extension pipe **2711** on another stub post **2712** at its lower end, and by snap engagement at its upper end.

The handle frame **2704** also includes a hose hoop **2713** comprising an arcuate channel having a concave profile, which preferably matches the outer diameter of an accessory hose **2714**. The hose hoop **2713** is attached to (or formed with) the upper portion of the handle frame **2704**, and preferably is at least partly nested between the legs **2706**. The accessory hose **2714**, which is attached to the accessory inlet **2403** of the accessory valve **1501**, fits over the hose hoop **2713**, and preferably at least partially within the legs **2706**. One or more hose tabs **2715** may be provided to slightly envelop the accessory hose **2714** to help retain it in place. The free end of the accessory hose **2714** optionally terminates at a rigid pipe **2716**, which also fits within one of the legs **2706**, and is secured in place by a stub post **2717**. As shown in Figure R**6**, the cover plate **2202** covering the lower part of the rear frame **1401** may also include a cutout **2718** into which the rigid pipe **2716** fits to further help retain it in place.

This preferred handle assembly **1402** construction provides convenient concealed storage of both the accessory hose **2714**, and various accessory tools, such as a crevice tool **2709** and an extension pipe **2711**. The use of the deeply profiled legs **2706** allows various accessory tools **2709**, **2711** to be concealed behind the accessory hose **2714**, but still readily accessible whenever necessary, and is also believed to add strength and torsional rigidity to the handle.

Referring now to FIGS. **30-33**, the present invention also provides a retractable cordreel **1610**, which may be used in upright vacuum cleaners (as shown herein), or in other types of devices and appliances, such as canister vacuums. The cordreel **1610** generally comprises a mounting plate **3001** that is rigidly mounted to or captured within the vacuum cleaner housing, and a spool **3002** that is rotatably mounted on the mounting plate **3001**.

The spool **3002** comprises a generally cylindrical central hub **3201** (FIGS. **32** and **33**), to which first and second generally radially-extending flanges **3202**, **3203** are attached to form a cord holding region **3204** (FIG. **33**) therebetween. The central hub **3201** includes a central bore **3205** that fits over an axle **3206** that protrudes from the mounting plate **3001**, to thereby form a pivoting mount for the spool **3002**. A portion of the central hub **3201** is formed by a removable terminal block **3207**. One end of the power cord (not shown) is attached to the terminal block **3207** with its two electrical leads **3301** attached to corresponding sliding electric contact terminals **3302** (only one lead and contact are visible in FIG. **33**). When installed in the central hub **3201**, the terminal block **3207** forms a generally circular surface upon which the power cord winds when the spool **3002** is rotated. The terminal block **3207** also clamps down on the power cord to hold it against accidental removal.

The spool **3002** is retained on the axle **3206** by a terminal ring plate **3208**, which has two concentric terminal rings **3209**. The terminal ring plate is retained by a screw **3303** or other fastening arrangement, and has a tab (not shown) that fits into a notch **3211** on the end of the axle **3206** to keep it from rotating. The rings **3209** are electrically isolated from one another and each is attached to (or formed with) a separate terminal **3102** (FIG. **31**). Each ring **3209** is in contact with a corresponding contact terminal **3302** on the terminal block **3207** throughout the rotation of the spool **3002**, to thereby receive power from the power cord when it is plugged into a wall outlet or other power source. Power leads (not shown) to the rest of the vacuum cleaner are attached to the terminals **3102** to power the device.

The first flange **3202** is generally flat, and provided with numerous slots **3210** to ventilate the cordreel. The second flange **3203** is stepped at two locations. The first step is

formed by a first axially-extending wall **3212**. Wall **3212** extends away from the central hub **3201** and forms a flat, cylindrical chamber **3304** that is sized to receive a coiled flat spring assembly **3213**. The spring assembly **3213** is affixed to the first axial wall **3212** by hooking it into one or more slots **3214** in the wall **3212**, and is attached to the axle **3206** at one or more axle splines **3215**. In this manner, the spring assembly **3213** is extended when the spool **3002** is unwound, and provides a restoring force to retract the cord.

The second flange **3203** is stepped again at a second axial wall **3216**, which also extends away from the central hub **3201**. The second axial wall **3216** is positioned to circumferentially encase a corresponding fixed wall **3217** on the mounting plate **3001**, to thereby form a tortuous path that inhibits dirt from entering the inner parts of the cordreel **1610**. The second axial wall **3216** also forms a surface for contacting the spool brake **3218**, as described below. A felt seal or other sealing mechanism may be provided at this location, or elsewhere, to further seal the cordreel **1610** against dirt and dust.

The cordreel **1610** includes a spool brake **3218**, which is pivotally mounted on a pin **3219** on the mounting plate **3001**. A push nut **3220** is provided to hold the spool brake **3218** on the pin **3219**. As best shown in FIG. **31**, the spool brake comprises a cam-shaped device, preferably formed of a somewhat flexible and tactile material, that contacts the second axial wall **3216** of the spool **3002**. When the cordreel is retracted by the spring **3213**, (counter-clockwise in FIG. **31**), contact between the second axial wall **3216** and the cam-shaped spool brake **3218** tends to press the spool brake **3218** into the second axial wall **3216** to hold the spool **3002** in place. The spool brake **3218** is released by pressing down on its protruding actuation surface **3103** and rotating it counter-clockwise to take it out of contact with the second axial wall **3216**. A spring **3104** is provided to return the spool brake **3218** to contact the second axial wall **3216** and lock the spool **3002** from retracting when the actuation surface **3103** is released. The actuating surface **3103** may simply protrude outside the rear frame **1401** to be operated directly by the user, or it may be operated by intermediary parts. In a preferred embodiment, the actuating surface **3103** is operated by a foot pedal **1503**, which is shown in FIGS. **20** and **22**.

The cordreel **1610** is also provided with an inertia brake **3221** that helps prevent the spool **3002** from retracting too rapidly. The friction brake **3221** comprises a curved member, preferably metal or plastic, that is pivotally mounted on a pin (not shown) on the surface of the spool **3002** that faces the mounting plate **3001**. The friction brake **3221** normally rests loosely in the annular space between the outer surface of the first axial wall **3212** (which extends somewhat beyond the second flange **3203**, as shown in FIG. **33**), and the inner surface of the fixed wall **3217** of the mounting plate **3001**. However, when the spool is rapidly retracted, the inertia brake **3221** swings outward, urged by centripetal force, and contacts the fixed wall **3217**. The force of this contact depends on the speed of rotation, and thus it acts as a self-regulating speed brake.

The cordreel **1610** also includes a bracket arm **3003**, which can be used to help mount the cordreel **1610**, and which carries the cordreel electrical wires (not shown) and cooling hose (not shown). As shown in FIG. **33**, the bracket arm **3003** is formed by adjacent inner and outer members **3305**, **3306**, which together form a hollow passage **3307** through a portion of the arm **3003**. The bracket arm **3003** is attached to the mounting plate **3001** at one end by a hook **3222** that fits into a corresponding slot **3223** in the mounting plate **3001**. The bracket arm **3003** also includes a circular pocket **3224** that fits over the end of the terminal ring plate **3208** and its mounting screw **3303**. A screw **3225** is provided to pass through the bracket arm **3003** and into a threaded boss **3226** on the terminal ring plate **3208** to hold the bracket arm **3003** in place, and more securely retain the spool **3002** on the mounting plate **3001**. The end of the inner member **3305** extends past the outer periphery of the spool **3002**, and has a slot **3227** at its end to provide a convenient mounting point, if such is desired.

Cordreels often generate heat during use, and may be heated by adjacent parts, such as vacuum fan motors. As such, the cordreel of the present invention also includes a cooling system that uses the fan/motor **1603** to draw air through the central hub **3201** and over the electrical contacts **3302**, **3209**. As shown in FIGS. **32** and **33**, the terminal ring plate **3208** includes a vacuum port **3228** that passes entirely through the terminal ring plate **3208** to allow air communication therethrough. When assembled, the vacuum port **3228** inserts into a receiving boss **3229** on the bracket arm **3003**, which leads to the hollow passage **3307**. A cordreel-cooling vacuum hose **1611** (FIG. **16**) is attached to the hollow passage **3307** and to the fan/motor **1603**, such as by being placed in fluid communication with the bag chamber **1604** or motor inlet conduit **1618** upstream of the fan/motor **1603** or pre-motor filter (if one is used). Thus, the suction created by the fan/motor **1603** generates an air flow through the vacuum port **3228** that draws air through the cordreel **1610** to cool it. The cooling air flow may pass solely across the terminals **3302**, **3209**, or may also pass through the terminal block **3207** or through cooling holes **3230** (FIG. **33**) in the central hub **3201** to directly cool the coiled power cord. Other cooling airflow arrangements can be made by selectively providing holes, slots, or other air flow allowing apertures, as will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure.

The bracket arm **3003** may also include an auxiliary arm **3231** that extends around the spool **3002** and terminates adjacent to the mounting plate **3001**. The auxiliary arm **3231** has one or more vacuum hose clips **3232**, and one or more wire clips **3233** that hold the cordreel-cooling vacuum hose **1611** and power wires in position. The auxiliary arm **3231** may also help stabilize the cordreel **1610**.

While the embodiments described herein are preferred, these are not intended to limit the scope of the invention. Furthermore, the various inventions disclosed herein are not required to be practiced in conjunction with one another. Many additional variations on the embodiments herein will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the present disclosure and with practice of the invention. These and other variations are within the scope of the present invention, which is limited only by the appended claims.

We claim:

1. A vacuum cleaner comprising:

a dirt receptacle;

an exhaust chamber;

a vacuum fan adapted to create a flow of air from the dirt receptacle, through the vacuum fan, and into the exhaust chamber;

a grate covering the exhaust chamber and having an inner surface defining a first side of the grate, an outer surface facing opposite the inner surface and defining a second side of the grate, one or more air passages extending from the inner surface to the outer surface, and an outer perimeter wall defining the peripheral edge of the grate; and

a flexible cover wrapped around the grate from the outer surface to the inner surface, the flexible cover having:

a first portion located on the second side of the grate, extending over at least one of the one or more air passages and positioned over at least a portion of the outer surface,

a second portion extending from the first portion, the second portion extending from the outer surface to the inner surface to wrap, in a direction extending from the outer surface to the inner surface, entirely around at least a portion of the outer perimeter wall, and

a third portion located on the first side of the grate and extending from the second portion to be positioned over at least a portion of the inner surface to thereby lie in a space that is perpendicular to the inner surface.

2. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the exhaust chamber comprises an air-impermeable surface adapted to form a portion of a bag chamber and one or more sealing surfaces surrounding the air-impermeable surface.

3. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the exhaust chamber is positioned adjacent the inner surface of the grate and adapted to convey a flow of air along at least a portion of the grate.

4. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the flexible cover is adapted to diffuse the flow of air after it passes through the exhaust chamber.

5. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the exhaust chamber comprises an air-impermeable surface adapted to form a portion of a bag chamber, one or more sealing surfaces surrounding the air-impermeable surface, and an exhaust chamber positioned adjacent the inner surface of the grate and adapted to convey a flow of air along at least a portion of the grate.

6. The vacuum cleaner of claim **5**, wherein the exhaust chamber further comprises a portion adapted to cover a vacuum cleaner exhaust air opening and direct air from the exhaust air opening to the exhaust chamber.

7. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the grate comprises a rigid panel, and the one or more air passages comprise a plurality of circular holes.

8. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the grate comprises a separate part that is attached to the exhaust chamber.

9. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, further comprising one or more tensioning members positioned adjacent the inner surface of the grate and adapted to hold the flexible cover in tension over the outer surface of the grate.

10. The vacuum cleaner of claim **9**, wherein the flexible cover comprises a perimeter edge having a wire positioned therein, the wire being adapted to engage the one or more tensioning members.

11. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the flexible cover extends over the entire outer surface of the grate.

12. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the outer surface of the grate is convex and the inner surface of the grate is concave.

13. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, further comprising a filter located in a generally airtight passage extending between the vacuum fan and the exhaust chamber, and adapted to filter the flow of air as it passes from the vacuum fan to the exhaust chamber.

14. The vacuum cleaner of claim **13**, wherein the filter is removably mounted in a filter mount located in the generally airtight passage and held in place by a removable filter clamp, the filter clamp having one or more openings adapted to direct air passing through the filter towards the exhaust chamber.

15. The vacuum cleaner of claim **14**, wherein the flexible cover is adapted to distribute the flow of air over a surface area substantially greater than the area of the filter mount.

16. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the dirt receptacle comprises a vacuum bag chamber adapted to retain a vacuum filter bag therein.

17. The vacuum cleaner of claim **16**, wherein the vacuum bag chamber comprises a removable cover, and at least a portion of the exhaust chamber and at least a portion of the grate are located on the removable cover.

18. The vacuum cleaner of claim **1**, wherein the exhaust chamber further comprises:

a rigid frame having an outer perimeter and an opening therethrough.

19. A vacuum cleaner comprising:

a base adapted for movement over a surface to be cleaned;

a rear housing pivotally mounted to the base at a first end thereof, and having a hand grip at a second end thereof;

a dirt receptacle chamber located in the rear housing, the dirt receptacle chamber having a dirt receptacle chamber opening facing a first side of the rear housing;

a vacuum fan having an inlet and an outlet and being located in the rear housing adjacent the dirt receptacle chamber;

an intake air passage extending from the base, through the dirt receptacle chamber, and to the vacuum fan inlet;

an exhaust filter mount in fluid communication with the vacuum fan outlet, the exhaust filter mount comprising an open passage facing the first side of the rear housing;

an exhaust filter adapted to removably cover the exhaust filter mount;

an exhaust filter clamp adapted to removably cover the exhaust filter and hold the exhaust filter in place adjacent the exhaust filter mount;

a cover adapted to removably attach to the first side of the rear housing to overlie the exhaust filter clamp, exhaust filter, exhaust filter mount and dirt receptacle chamber opening, the cover comprising:

an exhaust chamber adapted to be in fluid communication with the exhaust filter when the cover is attached to the rear housing,

a grate and/or a flexible cover enclosing the exhaust chamber and forming an exit from the exhaust chamber, the grate and/or the flexible cover having a surface area that is substantially greater than a surface area of the exhaust filter mount; and

a surface adapted to enclose the dirt receptacle chamber opening when the cover is attached to the rear housing; and

wherein the grate and/or the flexible cover comprises a planar portion that faces the exhaust filter mount, and wherein the exhaust filter clamp is adapted to direct air passing through the filter mount such that it does not pass in a straight line from the exhaust filter mount to the planar portion.

20. The vacuum cleaner of claim **19**, wherein the cover comprises a grate and a flexible cover.

21. The vacuum cleaner of claim **19**, wherein the dirt receptacle chamber comprises a bag chamber adapted to receive a filter bag therein.

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